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**Growing Grassroots Sustainability Groups:  
Understanding the Mobilisation of Community-led Action in  
Haringey, London**

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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**Submitted May 2018**



# Abstract

## **Growing Grassroots Sustainability Groups: Understanding the Mobilisation of Community-led Action in Haringey, London**

Anastasia Marshall

With the transition to a more sustainable society high on the agenda of academia and policymakers, ‘community’ is advocated as having an essential role in delivering behaviour change. Run by small collections of residents, grassroots sustainability groups have emerged as a means of mobilising citizens and other stakeholders in their locale. Explorations of the groups tend to coalesce in narrowly thematic literatures focusing on a single type of activity, such as community energy, gardening, or the Transition Movement. Participants in these initiatives identify with the environmental movement, and therefore this thesis explores grassroots sustainability as a social movement. It contributes to the understanding of this mobilisation through an ethnography of neighbouring groups engaged in different sustainability-related activities in a London borough. They include a group promoting renewable energy, a group involved in nurturing community space, urban food and well-being, a group experimenting with urban food and seeding other community projects, and a group engaged in communal foraging. The groups were networked together across the borough and involved in networks and collaborations at various scales to support their mobilisation. The theoretical approach utilises a social practice framework directed by insights from the social movement theory, demonstrating the utility of applying social practice theory both to complex bundles of social practices and to social movement enquiry. The thesis explores individuals’ motivations and participation temporalities, the practices performed to encourage participants through stages of participation, the mobilisation practices in physical and virtual spaces, and those which extend the groups’ influence. Culturally each group differs, with practice performance unique in each. However, common ingredients are found to contribute to the groups’ longevity: a practice-change-oriented sustainability, which supports a journey of experimentation, nurtures conviviality, and which is characterised by collaborative leadership. These ingredients help explain how and why grassroots sustainability groups continue to mobilise.





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# Chapter 1 Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the thesis. I explain why I was interested in addressing **How are grassroots sustainability groups mobilising?**, the research context, and how I developed the research questions and research approach.

The inspiration for the research stemmed from my mobilisation in grassroots sustainability action, which began in 2009 and so I start, in 1.1, with my story of participation. I was intrigued by the growth in groups in my local area in London. These groups were part of a movement, a specific form of environmentalism, which was bringing those who had never been active in sustainability or community action, together. My aim was to contribute to the burgeoning literature on grassroots groups by conceiving of them as a mobilisation, exploring how they were mobilising and changing practices through an ethnography of neighbouring groups involved in different activities, from community energy to foraging.

This grassroots sustainability action was framed by a particular policy approach, which I discuss in 1.2. 'Community' was being given responsibility to encourage individual behaviour change, to help achieve carbon dioxide emissions reduction and renewable energy targets. Academic research into groups reflected this and typically followed the focus of activities, with distinct literatures on community renewable energy, community gardening, foraging, and the burgeoning interest in the Transition Movement.

However, through my local group, I had become connected with a borough-wide network of over 50 organisations involved in sustainability, ranging from energy to foraging and beyond. They identified with the environmental movement, and both influenced and collaborated with the local council. This inter-group and group-led networking inspired ethnography at the borough scale to explore these neighbouring groups. I explain how I addressed the topic in 1.3. I conclude the chapter in 1.4, with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

Much has changed since I started my mobilisation and thesis journey in 2010, particularly the policy and funding landscape. However, the groups, and the borough-wide network, were still active at the time of writing in 2018, with many of the same residents involved eight years later. Recently, I chatted to one of my new neighbours, having moved within the borough again. I discovered he is the son of one of my first



interviewees and he explained that his father is still passionate about energy and as active as ever in the group today. Once this thesis is complete, the summary for groups is prepared, and the children are in bed, I too am looking forward to returning to my local group. For now, I go back to the beginning.

## **1.1 Becoming an environmentalist**

After encouraging consumption during a career in advertising, I became interested in a more positive form of marketing: encouraging the reduction of consumption and carbon footprints. I consequently returned to academia, in 2009, to study for an MSc on social issues around environmental sustainability. Concurrently, I moved to Haringey. Having lived in central London most of my life, this was the first time I felt a sense of community. This came from owning a home, getting to know my neighbours, and becoming involved in local community action. I joined a local grassroots sustainability group that encouraged carbon dioxide emissions reduction. This led to my awareness of, and engagement with, other local groups in Haringey.

Participation inspired my MSc dissertation; 'Towards a low carbon society: Exploring "community" in a new urban community renewable energy initiative'. I undertook the fieldwork, during 2010, with a single local community group (the Energy group), which had launched in 2009. The group hosted talks, DIY workshops, campaigned on the local high street, and I encountered their stalls at other community events. I interviewed the council, and learned about the Low Carbon Zone (LCZ) collaboration between the council and the Energy group, which provided funding for household energy-saving measures and solar panels on community buildings. This combination of encouraging practice change, campaigning, and collaborations was fascinating and merited further investigation. I also encountered a plethora of exciting local groups via the borough-wide sustainability network. Many had launched in 2008 and 2009 and were growing rapidly. Just as I was new to this growing local green action, academic research hearteningly found that such groups were joined by many people who have previously engaged neither in environmentalism nor community action (Haxeltine & Seyfang 2009, Seyfang 2009a, b).

This thesis was inspired by my growing concerns about climate change, peak oil, and the slow progress of the UK's transition to a post-carbon society. My personal

experiences, and these signs of the mobilisation of those new to community action and environmentalism, gave me hope that community-led action may inspire broader action on sustainability. These experiences and concerns led me to consider, **How are grassroots sustainability groups mobilising?**

Before I became involved, such action was invisible to me. However, over 50 local groups considered themselves part of the environmental movement and, while some individuals referred to themselves as 'activists', many did not. Groups focused on a range of activities, including reducing energy use, installing renewable energy technologies, food growing, encouraging well-being, Transition, economic endeavours, and foraging. Each group was unique and yet they were networked together at the borough level (the Borough Network). Much of the prevailing policy focused on community action related to reducing energy use and energy production, but this action extends to a much wider range of activities. The tendency of academic literature at the time to focus on single kinds of activity, such as community renewable energy and Transition, inspired me to examine the research question from a borough scale. I conducted an ethnography with groups networked together in Haringey during 2011-2012. They were an Energy group, a Nurture group (involved in food growing and well-being), a Transition group and their primary project the Urban Food growing group (which was seeding other community growing projects), and a communal Foraging group.

There were four areas of interest that related to my mobilisation experiences that I noticed were not explained in my initial reading about the topic and research context in the academic literature. These gaps became the areas of focus for my subsequent literature and policy review. First, members evoked place, a sense of community, shared concerns, and espoused local practical action to encourage more sustainable practices in our conversations. They also revealed greater complexity about motivations, with sustainability issues, personal benefit, and social considerations often cited as important. Members had unique motivations, immersion and networks, and so responded to diverse narratives and realised differing benefits. Whilst many described themselves as environmentalists and 'typical greens', plenty did not, echoing the aforementioned academic evidence of increasing involvement by new participants.

Second, my sense of dynamism, fluidity and connectivity was not reflected. My participation was a journey, influenced by work and home, and, later in 2013, starting a

family. Through one group I had encountered a multitude of others. The shifting experiences of mobilisation, changing involvement and capacities to be involved, connections between individuals, groups and networks and institutions and context at a multitude of scales were ripe for further exploration.

Third, the typical top-down, education of rational-man policy approaches seemed simplistic, and did not consider the role of learning and inter-personal connections in local experiments. The groups co-created new knowledges and centralised collective experiences. They were shifting social practices and creating new physical and virtual spaces. Having fun with 'like-minded' people was crucial, but rarely addressed in policy or research.

Last, my local groups engaged in different practices and operated alongside each other, with overlapping concerns, networks of members, structures, and resources. The multiplicity of 'community' was important; as an obligating and legitimising narrative, part of the groups' identity, and the locale in which mobilisation was occurring. The groups were concurrently communities of place, practice, and interest, with their development inseparable from neighbouring groups and networks. This complex and relational co-performance implied a heterogeneity rarely explored in-depth. Discourse typically conceives 'community' and 'community group' as homogenous, and with groups explored in distinct literatures associated with their activity-focus, or as distanced case studies. This highlighted the benefit of exploring groups over space and time to understand their similarities, differences, and connections.

To explore how grassroots groups were mobilising I wanted to delve deeper. To understand how the neighbouring groups met participants' multiple motivations, how they changed the practices of their members, how they encouraged mobilisation through their practices and their networked connections, and how they mobilised both their members and wider publics. To address these areas of interest, more detailed research questions were developed after reviewing the research context, to which I turn next.

## 1.2 The research context

In this section, I explore aspects of the context in which the grassroots sustainability groups were mobilising. These aspects influenced their growth, their approaches, and my research interests during the design phase during 2010-2011. Being involved in groups and researching them, meant I swung between lamenting the lack of meaningful climate action by the international community, and optimism due to the increasing interest in community-led progression to a low-carbon society by groups, policymakers, and researchers. Members of the Energy group felt similarly, with discussions revealing a range of emotions, from despair to energised inspiration.

Internationally, there had been a considerable lack of political consensus and, therefore, coordinated progress, despite much debate over how and where a transition to a low carbon future would occur. More than 100 world leaders participated in the United Nations Climate Change conference<sup>1</sup> in 2009, yet negotiators were unable to secure a legally-binding deal. Instead, they agreed a vague political declaration, which recognised that the global temperature rise should be limited to two degrees Celsius (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions 2017). Nationally, cross-party support of the subsequent cross-government Carbon Plan, launched in 2011, also secured little progress (The Guardian 2011). David Cameron's claim that his government would be the 'greenest government ever' was increasingly criticised by commentators (ibid., and see, for example, Jonathan Porritt March 2011).

The Energy group complained about this lack of progress and political hyperbole, with some members citing it as a primary motivation for their recent commitment to the group. The group bemoaned this lack of action at the speaker events, in their efforts to mobilise wider publics. I sought to understand the relationship between individuals, mobilisation practices, and such contextual factors within the neighbouring groups. The concept of 'community' was attracting the attention of both policymakers and academic research as a means of achieving carbon-reduction targets and changing individuals' unsustainable behaviours. Both because of, and despite, such trends, community-led action on sustainability was growing, evidenced by my experiences, that of other members, and academic literature. I examine these trends in greater detail below.

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as COP15.

<sup>2</sup> The scheme - Assets of Community Value - was introduced to allow parish councils of community

## UK policy shifts

Environmental issues were increasing in profile in the UK, both in government policy and in the public's awareness. During the Labour Government (2007-2010), the UK committed to an 80% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, as part of the *Climate Change Act* (Great Britain 2008), and 15% of energy from renewable sources by 2020, as part of the EU Directive on Renewable Energy (European Parliament 2009). The issues became somewhat depoliticised, as evidenced by cross-party support for the *Climate Change Bill* (2008) (Rollinson 2010), though this trend is criticised for removing the incentive for political action (see, for example, Swyngedouw 2007). Pro-community initiatives featured significantly in the energy and environmental arena with Ed Miliband (the Labour politician) proclaiming 'alongside the country's low carbon transition plan, every business, every community will need to be involved' (Great Britain and DECC 2009: V).

Sustainability, economy, community, and politics were intertwined in the *Low Carbon Transition Plan* (launched July 2009), which pledged to create green jobs, homes, energy, lower emissions, and support 'individuals, communities and businesses to play their part' (DECC 2009). Communities' role in delivering change is part of the trend of increasing public participation (Barry and Doherty 2001), with government policies claiming the benefit of more inclusive and legitimate governance at the local level (Dryzek 2000). Other policy endeavours to decentralise responsibility included the *Sustainable Communities Act* (2007), which enabled councils to make proposals promoting local community sustainability that the government would then support. It was a prerequisite that local citizens were represented and agreed with the proposal before submission (ibid.), thus giving greater voice to residents' concerns.

This trend continued. In 2010, the 'Big Society' was the flagship policy of the Conservative Party election manifesto. The 'Invitation to Join the Government of Great Britain' envisioned a 'Big Society, not big government' promising to 'redistribute power from the central state to individuals, families and local communities to foster personal control and responsibility' (Conservative Party 2010: 35). The ambition was 'for every adult in the country to be a member of an active neighbourhood group' aided by trained community organisers (ibid.: 38) and became part of the legislative program of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition (2010-2015). The policy priorities were to give communities more powers through localism and devolution, encourage

volunteerism, transfer power from central to local government, support co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises, and publish government data to be open and transparent (Cameron 2011). The Localism Act (2011) enacted the devolution of powers to local authorities, communities, and individuals. It affected areas such as council tax and local referenda, rights for charitable trusts and voluntary bodies, the introduction of Assets of Community Value,<sup>2</sup> and planning restrictions.

These policies and acts of parliament, alongside international and national commitments, featured significantly in media discourse and within the Energy group and, I later found, in the other groups. They formed part of internal discussions around opportunities and threats for the groups' activities. There was a sense, in the Energy group, and particularly in the Borough Network, that this shift was an opportunity to have more significant influence with the council, and embed sustainability concerns in more extensive community-related proposals. There was some scepticism, however, that the council was merely shifting the hard work to local groups, with little support.

The academic commentary was, and is, critical of such trends. The problematisation of consumption and consumer behaviour means the citizen-consumer is implicated in encouraging sustainable lifestyles (Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000, Malpass et al. 2007, Barnett et al. 2010), with social marketing employed to identify those most amenable to correction (McKenzie-Mohr 2000, Defra 2008). 'Community' has been called upon by successive governments as a means of tackling individuals' problematic actions, so much so that 'community' is 'one of the most abused terms in the rhetoric of politics and policymaking' (Day 2006: 14). This governmental communitarianism aims to construct political subjectivity via policy development, new forms of governance, and by increased talk of volunteering, charity and self-organisation (Delanty 2003). Thus the call to action of 'community' is a way of devolving responsibility from government, enacting new means of social control, as well as advancing community empowerment.

The discourse of 'community' was, however, also crucial to the actions of grassroots sustainability groups. My MSc research found its usage legitimised the group's role and particularly in the context of policy calls for increased community action. It served as a rallying cry, a territorial stamp, and, while motivations were often in opposition to the

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<sup>2</sup> The scheme - Assets of Community Value - was introduced to allow parish councils of community groups to nominate assets. If accepted, local groups are given time to put together a bid for the asset when it is sold (Sandford 2017).

government's, there was an understanding of the opportunities and potential benefits to the group through the policies enacted and funding opportunities, described further below. I was interested in how the call to action of 'community', both at a policy and local government level, and within the groups, was affecting, and being utilised by, neighbouring groups, some with overlapping membership, and with different but overlapping concerns.

## Encouraging community involvement

'Community' was invoked by the government to increase investment in sustainability-related projects, and in initiating community-led experiments in behaviour change. In line with climate commitments, government-led initiatives tended to focus on growing renewable energy production and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Such initiatives occurred in a complex landscape of grassroots sustainability groups forming independently of such efforts, forming to take advantage of them, and existing groups becoming involved in projects and collaborations to benefit from funding and other resources. The Energy group had already benefited through external collaborators. I wanted to understand their role in mobilisation and explore how neighbouring groups were similarly, or differently, affected.

Local communities were encouraged to invest in community renewable energy, energy-efficiency, carbon dioxide emissions reduction, and local campaigning, with purported outcomes including civic engagement, reducing NIMBYism,<sup>3</sup> and sourcing financial investment (Walker et al. 2007; Walker et al. 2010a,b). Further benefits were claimed, of tackling fuel poverty, energy security, job creation, and positive behaviour change, such as reducing household emissions through increased energy visibility (DTI 2006). Market stimulation measures were developed; the feed-in tariff (launched 1st April 2010) was a fixed income per unit of energy generated and fed back into the energy system. This incentivised small-scale household and community micro-producers through income generation and a significant reduction in the pay-back period for their initial capital investment (DECC 2010a). The *Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order* removed the need for planning permission for certain micro-generation installations, which had been a significant barrier to growth, particularly in urban areas (DECC 2009, Green Wise 2009).

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<sup>3</sup> NIMBY is an abbreviation for Not in My Back Yard.

In 2010, the Energy group had identified these measures as making investments in a scheme to install solar panels on local buildings appear more attractive to the group and potential shareholders, and its implementation more achievable. I sought to explore how the continuing developments in policy were affecting my local groups' mobilisation and others. The government claimed to support community energy development through *Community Energy Online*; a website hosting *how to* and *good practice* guides, explanations of funding, regulation and legal issues. This provision was deemed inadequate by members of the Energy group, who explained that it lacked detail, local relevance, and publicity. They considered it to be a 'box-ticking' exercise, rather than offering the support needed by local groups to navigate the complexities of setting up community-led projects. They highlighted how other non-governmental networks and organisations were providing help more effectively, and how they shared their experiences through them, as well as benefiting from the experiences of others. I sought to explore these networks, and connections within and between the local grassroots sustainability groups.

Funding and support schemes for community-led sustainability experiments were launched. The Department of Energy and Climate Change Low Carbon Communities Challenge (LCCC) (2010-2012) was designed to understand the role of communities, and provide support packages in delivering carbon dioxide budgets and renewable energy targets, to stimulate involvement of citizens, generate PR, and measure both the efficacy of such initiatives and broader socio-environmental-economic impacts (DECCb 2010). The 22 communities invested in renewables, insulation, transportation, green technologies, permaculture, and combinations thereof, with ten of the projects including community renewable energy (DECC 2012). They were all geographically targeted and drew on sociological models of behaviour to nudge community-wide change (ibid.).

To achieve London's carbon dioxide emissions reduction target of 60% by 2025, the Greater London Authority (GLA) funded ten Low Carbon Zones (LCZ) trialling measures, such as solar PV, and recycling waste for clean fuels (GLA 2010). Ten zones were supported by external expertise and funding as 'a community-led approach to cutting the capital's emissions'. Measures included insulation, smart meters, retrofitting public buildings, decentralised energy plants, solar PV and clean fuels, with the aim that successful models would be replicated elsewhere in future (ibid.). Each zone trialled different approaches, though all used domestic home energy assessments to encourage



behaviour change and the implementation of carbon dioxide emissions saving measures (Bridgeman 2014). The Energy group benefited, receiving LCCC funding, and involvement in the Muswell Hill LCZ. This project was in collaboration with Haringey Council, which also supported community sustainability-related action through their Green Team, and provided funding for local groups to aid the council achieve their Haringey 40:20 carbon dioxide reduction commitments. Therefore, I turned attention to how groups mobilise externally; seeking funding alongside collaborators, councils, and other local stakeholders. I sought to explore the different behaviour-change approaches undertaken by groups within project spaces and the home. I was curious as to the effect on neighbouring groups who were not direct beneficiaries of government-led initiatives; they were aware of the programmes, and the development of well-funded projects, through shared members and networking. I considered the role of changing and differently-experienced contextual factors, inter-group networks, and the sharing of ideas across groups.

## **The growth of grassroots sustainability groups**

Evidence for the growth of grassroots sustainability groups, in part, inspired this research project. I combined personal and local contacts' experiences of growth with an examination of the literature, to establish how well developed the understanding was of urban groups engaged in different sustainability concerns.

I encountered growth. Grassroots sustainability groups were growing in Haringey, attested to by members of the Energy group and the Borough Network during my MSc and thesis fieldwork in 2010-2012. They saw themselves as increasingly essential change-agents representing the locale; creating sustainable communities via personal lifestyle changes, campaigning, and face-to-face activities, though *how* this occurred varied significantly. Activities included volunteering at project spaces, encouraging household measures, residents' education, and local stakeholder lobbying. Concerns included energy, local food, fair-trade, waste, reducing consumption and, increasingly, employment and the local economy. Each group engaged in unique activities driven (in my experience) by the interests of core members in conjunction with local contextual factors. It was interesting to note that the level of interconnection between the groups, beyond the Borough Network, varied; ranging from the global Transition Network through to more independent groups. This growth and variety, alongside my

experiences of recent mobilisation, highlighted the complexities of individuals' motivations and neighbouring groups' endeavours, and the benefit of conducting a cross-group comparison. I also sought to understand the differential role of networks and other means of support for each group, and the impact of varying interconnectedness between them.

There were signs of growth in the academic literature. While there was no comprehensive mapping of growth across all grassroots sustainability groups (in the UK), I found evidence from community renewable energy. The studies include all types of community-related projects; from farmer-owned wind turbines serving a local populace, through to community-owned and managed initiatives, amalgamated due to the policy (and resultant research focus) on encouraging (mainly rural) projects to overcome siting objections (Walker 2008). While it was impossible to single out community-owned projects, overall expansion in community renewable energy was identified alongside the more recent development in urban areas (Walker et al. 2010b).

The rapid growth of the Transition Movement provided confirmation, growing from a single initiative in 2005 to 360 across 34 countries in 2011 (Transition Network 2011), developing mainly under the radar and as a response to lack of governmental action (Barry and Quilley 2008, Hopkins 2008a,b), yet also having increasing political impact (Miliband 2009). It was conceived as a practical solution to climate change and peak oil, also problematising behaviour and employing positive narratives of local energy security, food self-sufficiency, and the development of local skills (Hopkins and Lipman 2008; Haxeltine and Seyfang 2009; Seyfang 2009b). It described itself as a social experiment on a massive scale (Hopkins 2008b), offering support, yet allowing initiatives to develop according to their local context, deemed one reason for its success (Seyfang 2009b). Thirty-two percent of members in Norwich were not engaged in any similar local action, and new members represented a different demographic from those previously involved in community action (Seyfang 2009a).

The evidence of growth explains my interest, and that of other academics and policymakers, in community-led action as means of experimenting with driving behaviour change and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. The monitoring of growth was limited to single types of groups' activities. However, my knowledge that the Energy group was attracting those who were new to grassroots action, alongside the existing research, led me to consider *how* groups were successfully mobilising. How

were grassroots sustainability groups, Transition and otherwise, mobilising new participants? How did approaches differ? How was local urban context influencing mobilisation? These areas of interest contributed to the development of the research questions and the use of a practice-informed ethnography.

## **Growth in academic research on groups**

Here I discuss the effects of the growth of academic research as it benefited groups, highlighted a clear research opportunity, and informed my methodological approach. The growth had positive effects, through bringing attention to the groups, highlighting the benefits of their activities, providing evidence that encouraged funding initiatives, and the sharing of positive case stories across groups. The Energy group, for example, noted the positive involvement of academics within the Low Carbon Communities Network (LCCN) events that they attended.

There were adverse effects; research abstraction was highlighted, both by core members of the Energy group, and many of those I met at conferences in the Transition network. It was a consequence of an increasing number of researchers ‘parachuting in’ and providing little useful information afterwards that benefited the groups. This consequence appeared, in part, to be due to the research practices used, such as a reliance on interviews. This resulted in leaders and core members being repeatedly asked to donate their time. In addition, researchers spent little time with the group as a whole, and so many voices went unheard. As a result, some groups were becoming reluctant to support academic research endeavours.

There was a body of academic work developing that took a participatory and supportive approach, often through the involvement of researchers who were also activists. The efforts of the Transition research network, which launched in 2010 (and in which I participated), not only formalised the research process to address the issue of abstraction but also took seriously the development of research themes and projects that would be most helpful to groups. These also helped solve concerns, such as the lack of local case studies to share across the network. This activity not only supported my knowledge development, but also provided examples that I could share with groups, to illustrate how research could be beneficial.

Research into groups, explored further in the next chapter, had previously tended to focus on individual case studies in geographically-separated locations. It tended to coalesce in narrowly thematic literatures, focusing on a single type of activity, such as community gardens (for example, Cameron et al. 2010, Veen & Derkzen 2011), community renewable energy and Transition (as discussed earlier), or EcoTeams (for example, Hobson 2003, Hargreaves 2008, Nye and Hargreaves 2009). Examples of work using case studies of activities in distant locations include analysis of a group in Cheshire and a network of US Native American communities developing renewable energy (Middlemiss and Parrish 2009). These studies were frequently in rural or town settings due to the predominant location of the groups at that time. The methods selected in these studies tended toward questionnaires and interviews.

Together the focus and methods of existing research coalesced to affect my approach. This thesis provides a complementary perspective across multiple geographically-connected groups with different sustainability-related concerns. Conducting an ethnography allowed time to participate and contribute in the groups, as well as observe and interview. The focus of previous research meant that there were clear benefits to my research design and academic contribution, which the groups appreciated and which helped to gain their support during fieldwork. In the next section I explain how I approached exploring the question: **how are grassroots sustainability groups mobilising?**

## 1.3 Problematising grassroots sustainability

To address **How are grassroots sustainability groups mobilising?** I wanted to explore the practices encouraging involvement of both experienced members and those, such as myself, who were new to grassroots action. As discussed earlier (in 1.1), my involvement identified areas for further exploration; complex motivations, dynamism and connectedness in participation, the role of the group in practice change, and the co-constitutive mobilisation effects beyond the groups.

Exploring the research context provided understanding of the policy focus on community as a means of delivering behavioural changes and how specific kinds of groups were benefiting from funding opportunities and supportive policies in 2010-2012. My experiences and earlier research had identified signs of growth in

neighbouring groups involved in different sustainability action. Academic research, however, tended to focus on groups involved in single types of activity, and was limited to case studies and interviews (as discussed in 1.2). This demonstrated the benefit of my approach; to understand how groups were mobilising by comparing groups involved in different activities, using a longer-term ethnographic approach, and exploring groups that were networked together at the borough scale. Through this I contribute a detailed perspective on how grassroots community-led action on sustainability occurred within a single urban borough.

To understand these relationships further, I focused on practices; both to explore how groups change sustainability-related practices, and to understand the practices involved more generally in the mobilisation of individuals, groups, and beyond. I decided, given the flourishing activity in Haringey and my connections to the groups, that the borough would be a productive field site. The theoretical framework, a practice approach framed by insights from understandings of social movements, is explained in the literature review, chapter 2. The research design and how the groups were engaged with, is described in detail in the discussion of methods in chapter 3.

Three broad questions assisted my exploration:

### 1 How and why are people participating?

This focuses on individual participation. It delves into individuals' motivations for joining grassroots groups, their different modes of participation, the impacts of involvement in their lives, and how these change over time. It asks participants about their biographies, how they understand their mobilisation and relationship with the groups.

### 2 What are the groups' practices of mobilisation?

This focuses on the groups. It examines how practices are performed to mobilise the group. Areas for consideration include how the groups engage with potential members, what the groups do together, how the groups are maintained outside of their face-to-face activities, and how the groups are managed.

### 3 How do grassroots sustainability groups mobilise beyond the group?

This focuses on how groups reach out, and explores how groups mobilise (and are themselves mobilised) through relationships with each other, and through their

networks. It addresses how they affect and are affected by connections with their local council and other actors (such as businesses and NGOs).

Throughout, the ethnography of neighbouring groups and their borough-wide network enables me to consider two key aspects, which offer unique contributions to the literature. First, how practices are performed similarly, and differently, in neighbouring groups engaged in different activities but networked together. Second, how practices endure and change over time. My completion of this research was interrupted due to having a family, however finishing the thesis in 2018 proved beneficial and enabled me to consider the longevity of groups, their ongoing success, and how they reacted to changing contextual factors.

## 1.4 Overview of the chapters

Thus far, I have explained how my personal experience of mobilisation, alongside my increasing understanding of the political and social landscape, inspired me to explore **how are grassroots sustainability groups mobilising?** The rest of the thesis continues the story of the exploration and is structured into seven chapters.

Chapter 2, Exploring mobilisation, is the literature review, conducted to inform and refine the research questions and methods. First, I delve deeper into the policy and academic focus on encouraging behaviour change, and introduce the alternative perspective of shifting social practices. I review the existing understanding of grassroots sustainability groups, through the individual literatures on single types of activity, and highlight findings I found useful to consider during fieldwork. Second, I explain the theoretical approach, exploring theories of practice and theories of social movements, and the existing links between the two literatures. From this I map the practice approach, informed by social movements, onto the research questions, explaining in detail how I proposed to explore each theme during fieldwork.

Chapter 3, Researching mobilisation, describes the methods. I explain why ethnography, and considering ethnography-as-practice, was the most appropriate means of exploration. I map the methods onto the research questions and the analytical approach. I explain how the ethnography and analysis was performed, and introduce Haringey, the grassroots sustainability groups' and their networks.

I then move into the discussion of the materials and analysis in four chapters. Each has a different focus and addresses differing combinations of the research questions.

Chapter 4, Mobilising Motivations, primarily addresses **how and why are people participating?** I discuss the stories and biographies of the participants and their participation. I explore the multiplicity of motivations, how they change, and identify key mobilisation practices identified by group participants for further investigation.

Chapter 5, Stages of mobilisation, addresses **how and why are people participating?** and **what are the groups' practices of mobilisation?** This continues the story of individuals' participation, explored through a temporal lens. I recognise four stages of participation across the groups, and explain the significant mobilisation practices characterising each.

Chapter 6, Mobilising Together, focuses on **what are the groups' practices of mobilisation?** Here I foreground the ethnographic register, describing participating in a range of mobilisation practices with each group. I compare similarities and differences between the groups, highlighting the important ingredients of mobilisation, the shared characteristics, and the differences in group culture.

Chapter 7, Leading Mobilisation, focuses on **how do grassroots sustainability groups mobilise beyond the group?** It also contributes further understanding to **how and why are people participating?** and **what are the groups' practices of mobilisation?** I discuss leadership as a social construction and co-performed bundle of leadership practices. I discuss the co-practitioners of leadership, their attributes, and how they work with others, and the practices performed to manage the group and draw in resources from networks and collaborations.

Chapter 8, Understanding mobilisation, concludes the thesis. It reflects on the ingredients that characterise successful groups, which contributes to our understanding of **how grassroots sustainability groups are mobilising?**

## Chapter 2 Exploring mobilisation

In this chapter, Exploring Mobilisation, I explain how my initial research interests and questions developed through an exploration of the literature. My approach to the research was a social constructionist perspective, using social practice theory to understand the practices of mobilisation, with contributions from social movement literature. This chapter explains how this approach was developed.

I was already in the field, connected to other members, and invested in the groups' success. Therefore, my experiences of mobilisation, research training, thesis aims, questions and design, initial areas of interest, and ongoing analysis were inevitably messily co-constitutive. For the purposes of explanation, they are discussed here more linearly. I found it helpful to consider ethnography-as-practice when advancing the project — from question development, generating materials and analysis, to writing this final document. I detail the approach in the explanation of methods; however, it is useful to highlight here. Considering the evolution of research questions as the outcome of research practices and related to how I envisaged the field, helped inform the route through the literature review. I considered how bodies of literature develop, and how my research, and research questions, relate to them.

I found navigating a route through the literature to help me refine my research questions and theoretical framework a challenge. The main empirical contribution of my work, given the usual focus on single types of groups in the academic literature, is the comparison of neighbouring groups engaged in different activities. However, this approach meant that I could include multiple literatures and a variety of methods to conduct the research. Rather than expanding existing approaches to other kinds of groups, I began with what the groups were themselves trying to do: change practices. The starting point, therefore, was the group practices that endeavour to improve sustainability-related practices and behaviours.

Resultantly, the literature review was conducted to develop the research design in two ways. First, in 2.1, I interrogate the policy landscape and establish the understanding of the groups at the time of research design. To do this, I delved deeper into the policy and academic focus on encouraging behaviour change, and introduce the alternative perspective of shifting social practices, which reflects what the groups were endeavouring to achieve. I then review the existing understanding of grassroots



sustainability groups through the individual literatures on single types of activity, and highlight findings I found useful to consider during fieldwork. Within this, I discuss the terminology I used to describe the groups, which was important as this research explores groups across a spectrum of activities, and therefore does not sit neatly within an existing strand of literature.

Second, in 2.2, I explain the theoretical approach. To develop this, I explored theories of practice and theories of social movements, and the existing links between the two literatures. From this I mapped the practice approach, informed by social movements, onto the research questions, explaining in detail how I proposed to explore each theme during fieldwork.

This subject matter was (and remains) a dynamic research area, as the Transition Movement gained attention, and other grassroots sustainability groups gained funding through local government projects. To date, this thesis is unique in its approach: an urban, borough-scale ethnography of neighbouring groups engaged in a range of activities. The use of practice theories has expanded to larger scale practice-bundles, though I am yet to see a similar application to social movements.

## 2.1 Reviewing the understanding of groups

Here, I interrogate the policy landscape and explore the academic understanding of the groups at the time of research design in 2010-2011. The discussion is divided into three sections. First, I delve deeper into the prevailing policy and academic focus on encouraging behaviour change. I introduce the alternative perspective of shifting social practices, which reflects what the groups were endeavouring to achieve. Second, I review the existing understanding of grassroots sustainability groups, confirming the utility of my ethnographic and comparative approach, the benefit of a borough as an entry point, and identify knowledge gaps and insights for comparison with my findings. Third, I discuss the terminology used in previous research and explain my use of the phrase **grassroots sustainability groups** to capture their activities across the spectrum and guided by the discourse of the groups in the discussions of their activities. I use it to distinguish this work from established bodies of work, as both my questions, and temporal and spatial scale, are broader in their scope.

## Behaviour change or practice change?

Here I discuss the focus on behaviour-change in the policy and academic arena. I then introduce the alternative academic perspective of shifting social practices as a means of promoting sustainability, and how these perspectives related to my mobilisation experiences.

At the time of research design in 2010-2011, changing individuals' behaviour was a predominant focus of policy. In the wider low-carbon pathways discourse, there was a decided focus on the technical and economic (see, for example, Skea et al. 2011). As explained previously, carbon reduction commitments, associated policy developments, and research funding (such as through UKERC)<sup>4</sup> focused on energy transitions: decarbonisation, energy security, resilient energy systems, a low carbon economy, and renewable energy (ibid.). Where the social was considered, there were two aspects of policy. One was the role of community as a means of delivering change and the other was the intended outcome of their efforts: that of driving individual behaviour change (introduced in 1.2).

Individuals' lifestyle changes, and how to encourage pro-environmental behaviour, was dominant in both policy and in academic research on the social aspects of low carbon transition. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published a framework for encouraging pro-environmental behaviours and sought to increase contribution from individual and community action (Defra 2008). It used evidence on public understanding, attitudes, and behaviours to segment the population into seven clusters, with the aim of closing the identified value-action gap: the disparity between high levels of individuals' concern about the environment and their actions (see, for example, Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002). The framework included 12 behaviour goals to change individuals' decision-making on travel, home energy use, and household products, focusing on behaviours directly affecting carbon dioxide emissions, rather than wider actions where energy savings are not the primary focus (such as food growing). Strategic actions included interventions that would enable, encourage, engage, and exemplify, depending on the target segment; such as 'engaging through communications, community action, targeting individual opinion leaders' (Defra

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<sup>4</sup> UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC) launched in 2002. Phase II received significant funding and ran from 2009-2013, providing funding for a tranche of energy-related research influencing the context of this fieldwork.

2008:10). The role of 'community' within the framework was vague, however, with the only reference being to community-led pilot projects to be evaluated post-publication. I was not aware of any pilot projects directly funded by Defra. However, the policy developments and funding initiatives (described in 1.2) from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) also followed a similar individual behaviour change via community action approach.

From academia, there was a considerable body of work on social marketing, individual behaviour change, and behavioural economics. McKenzie-Mohr (2000) advocates the use of psychological insights, developing social marketing and removing barriers to individual behaviour change. Jackson (2005) discusses how to motivate individual sustainable consumption and highlights the model of discursive social change, which helps tackle entrenched routine and habitual behaviours. His examples of community-based approaches to social change include Global Action Plan's 'Action at Home' programme, where households commit to monitoring consumption of utilities, shopping, and transport habits and aim to make them more sustainable — supported by EcoTeams. He summarises recent community-based approaches to social change at that time in the energy sector (*ibid.*). In line with the aforementioned policy developments, these all focused on individual change, delivered in the community by interventions providing information, education and, for many renewable energy projects, encouraging communal ownership and investment.

Grassroots sustainability groups were increasingly focused upon, in policy and research, as a vital change-agent and means of delivering individual behaviour change through community-led experiments. Groups themselves were also focused on behaviour change, and used the same terminology. For example, the Transition Movement included 'street-by-street behaviour change' as one of the Ingredients of Transition (Transition Culture 2010). The Energy group aimed to encourage people to live more sustainably, change people's home energy and travel behaviour, and there was considerable interest in behavioural economics and, in particular, the book *Nudge* (Thaler and Sunstein 2008). The book draws on psychology and behavioural economics, espousing the benefits of 'choice architecture' and libertarian paternalism in ensuring consumers make the right choices in their behaviours.

According to my observations, the Energy group was doing much of what Jackson refers to; education, through talks and information provision, and providing

opportunities to invest. The group was also doing much more. They hosted workshops in a home that required draught-proofing, demonstrating the ease of installation, training interested people to make home improvements and giving access to cheaper materials via a bulk-buying group. These activities provided physical experience and skills to make changes themselves, and to be self-reliant instead of employing someone to do the work, which, the group had found, was off-putting for many. This approach changed their perceptions of what was achievable and affordable.

The activities undertaken by the Energy group correlated with the arguments raised by the more recent social practice literature: on the benefits of focusing on social practices in sustainability transitions over the predominant focus on rational man, and efforts to affect individual behaviour change (Shove 2010). When considering how to encourage shifts to sustainability, Shove argues that the emphasis on individual behaviour is limited. Such models — referred to as ABC models, which focus on individuals' attitude, behaviour, and choice — are overly rationalistic. They suggest that individuals will correctly evaluate the information they receive and amend their choices accordingly.

Social practice approaches instead put practices at the centre rather than the individual, or structures inhabited by individuals. The approach, to which I return in 2.2, brings attention to elements of practice, which are constituted of materials, competences and meanings. It explores the triumvirate of practice, practitioners and performances of practice (Shove and Pantzar 2005, Shove et al. 2012). This approach claims to balance the structure/agency dichotomy, and has recently developed into a significant body of work (for example, Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000; Pantzar and Shove 2005; Warde 2005; Shove 2010), referred to as the 'practice turn' (Schatzki et al. 2001). In relation to sustainability transitions, Shove argues that the predominant focus on behaviour change is to the detriment of considering broader societal transformation, and the connections between social practices, systems of provision, markets, institutions, and governance (Shove 2010).

In the DIY workshop hosted by the Energy group, I observed that practices were changing; skills taught, new meanings created, materials provided, and multiple future performances by the participants aided by improving the system of provision, albeit on a small local scale. I subsequently made changes to my home. My marketing background was also influential as, while the terminology is different, I knew the

benefits of experiential activities over information-led branding campaigns, and messages that acknowledged social structures and expectations of daily life rather than just providing the product benefits.

Therefore, the groups, and prevailing policy context at that time, considered behaviour change to be the route for achieving environmental benefits. I observed, however, that the Energy group and others were engaged in efforts to both provide information and to change social practices. The groups also employed particular practices to deliver these ends and to attract and retain members. I was interested how these both occurred, to greater or lesser success, in neighbouring groups. I was also curious about the practitioners, what they understood of their practices and their decision-making, and how the groups were influencing their behaviour. As explained earlier, I started with the groups' practices and how they mobilise. Using a social practice approach appealed as an appropriate way of exploring them by delving into elements of practice, connections between practices, their practitioners and performances. It was fruitfully put to use by Hargreaves (2008) in his ethnographic study of behaviour-change practices in the workplace. The practice approach had previously tended to focus on single practices such as showering (Hand et al. 2005), whereas Hargreaves applied it to the sociality of a group working on a behaviour change programme through encouraging practice change. This work demonstrated that using the practice approach was appropriate, and confirmed my aim of extending it to a comparative approach in neighbouring groups.

## **Different forms of community-led action**

Thus far, I have explained how my observations and personal involvement called the academic and policy orthodoxy in question. I discussed how efforts to affect individual behaviour-change dominated policy and research at the time of research design, and how a focus on social practices provided an alternative approach, which resonated with my experiences in the groups. I described the focus on community-led behaviour change and growth of grassroots sustainability groups, and explained the connections between groups' practices, policy practices, and research practices. I also highlighted how the academic literatures focused on particular kinds of groups separately, or through case studies in distant locations, and with infrequent use of ethnography. Before explaining the theoretical framework, I identify useful insights from the aforementioned thematic literatures on groups, discussing literature on community energy and

Transition, and my shift in reading to the food, growing and foraging literatures. While the literatures are based on different research questions and approaches, they influenced my research design and contributed to my interpretations. I highlight some of the areas of interest they inspired for further exploration.

## **Energy**

My membership of the Energy group meant community renewable energy literature was the natural starting point. During my MSc research in 2010, I had struggled to find many insights into community-owned and led initiatives in urban areas. This remained the case in 2011.

There were efforts to promote growth and investment in community renewable energy, yet 'community' was loosely defined, with the literature combining a range — from being located in a community asset to being community-owned and managed. The literature focused on prevailing rural concerns such as wind-farm locations and local acceptance and how to overcome them (see, for example, Bell et al. 2005, Hinshelwood 2001, Toke 2005, van der Horst and Toke 2010, Warren and McFadyen 2010). The benefits of community ownership are extolled, driving broader community support as well as a motivation for initiator groups (see, for example, Bolinger 2001, MacArthur 2010, Toke 2005, Warren and McFadyen 2010). Walker finds, looking beyond ownership alone, that local control increases legitimacy, reduces the number of planning issues, enhances the ability to influence scale and siting, and develops social relationships, builds trust, and greater environmental awareness (Walker 2008, Walker et al. 2010a,b).

Adams and Berry (2007) describe a variety of group motivations across their rural case studies; including environmental concerns, reducing emissions, influencing behaviour, education, energy self-sufficiency and resilience, supporting local needs (such as economic regeneration), and less reliance on the national energy system. They identify combinations of concerns and solutions, such as carbon neutrality and zero carbon villages, and peak oil and resilience and the Transition Movement (ibid.). Whilst they do not examine how the groups achieve these aims, they provide evidence of a range of (mainly energy-related) motivations across groups and suggest they are local context-related.

I found the insights into benefits and motivations informative. I wanted to explore *how*

groups achieved such impacts, and whether participants in the urban setting would identify similar motivations and benefits. I was also curious as to whether these were uniquely energy-related issues. Research had frequently found that motivations were highly matched to the groups' official aims. I wondered whether an ethnographic and semi-structured interview approach would find that individuals and groups identify a more detailed and/or varied set of concerns, as suggested by my mobilisation experiences.

There was also an exploration of perceived problems of community renewable energy. Devine-Wright's (2009) re-examination of NIMBY-ism, discusses the role of place-protection actions, founded upon the process of place attachment and place identity. There are parallels with themes within the social movement literature on place frames and place identity, discussed later, and this usefully highlighted not only *how* groups gain support through place and 'community' but also tackle opposition, should they face it, from the local community or other publics.

The identification of success factors was also useful. Walker et al. (2010b) recognise the importance of existing interpersonal relationships and social trust within the community. I knew social networks were crucial for bringing people to the Energy group and for retaining their involvement. I sought to investigate socio-spatial relations and how social networks featured, given questions of whether community exists in the urban context (Delanty 2003, Day 2006), and their roles across groups.

Community leadership, openness and accessibility, communication of progress and engagement of the wider stakeholders in activities such as fundraising are also identified as important (Walker et al. 2010b). These findings drew my attention to the role of leadership and communications, and the practices performed to engage broader publics.

Adams and Berry (2007) identify more practical factors; such as the easy installation of technologies due to available space, and reduced planning issues. I was aware of the challenges faced by the Energy group in finding space for solar panels and promoting their household uptake, due to restrictive planning rules, which was a particular issue in the local conservation area. I wanted to examine the opportunities and constraints of technologies, materials and space, and place-specific contexts, as factors influencing group practices.

The focus on rural settings, in literature, was due to predominant siting of projects in rural locations. Limited urban attention tended toward structural considerations: achieving demand-reduction, appropriate technology, and micro-generation installations (Hinnells 2008), household energy efficiency (Steg 2008), household micro-generation installations, and associated economic, regulatory, pricing, and policy support (Keirstead 2007b, Watson et al. 2008, Plater 2009). There was a dearth of investigations into how community-led and owned initiatives were operating in urban locations, and the regulatory and policy support highlighted (or lack thereof) was important for me to examine as factors affecting whether, and how, groups' projects could progress.

There was some attention to individuals and households as a locus of energy-related behaviour change within the broader sustainability literature. It examines the boomerang effect<sup>5</sup> (Alfredsson 2004), impact on energy usage through micro-generation technologies (Dobbyn and Thomas 2005, Keirstead 2007a), and impacts on the visibility of energy via smart-meters (Burgess and Nye 2008, Hargreaves 2010). The Energy group was promoting household measures as part of the Low Carbon Zone project, and initial results were positive. Therefore, I planned to explore grassroots sustainability groups' influence on individuals and household practices, and the practices performed to create that influence. I was curious how this extended to groups involved in non-energy-related activities and how they engaged people about changing practices, what spaces they used, and the challenges they faced.

Middlemiss and Parrish (2009), in their exploration of grassroots initiatives, include two case studies of community renewable energy and take a different approach to both the aforementioned literature and Grassroots Innovations, discussed next, though they position it in relation to the latter. They focus on community capacity, which, they argue, is critical to understand as a precursor to grassroots initiative development. One of their case studies, in a town location and which they characterise as professional, was undertaking some similar activities to the Energy group. Their group sought to change practices using the EcoTeam approach, public events and alliances with other stakeholders, focusing on member practice change, with plans to effect change in the wider community (ibid.).

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<sup>5</sup> The boomerang effect is the unintended consequence of an effort to change behaviour, resulting from restrictions on a person's freedom producing efforts not to conform.



In this thesis, I delve into how these activities were carried out in my local groups. Nevertheless, their explanation of the personal, cultural and organisational capacity of the members and local community as an explanation of the group's success is instructive. Individual members were motivated by the opportunity to share their considerable knowledge and skills; in turn this was culturally valued within the local community, with a high level of volunteerism (ibid.). They were supported through considerable local organisational capacity. Ultimately this, alongside funding opportunities, contributed to successful efforts to change infrastructural capacity, mainly through home energy measures (ibid.). While the terminology is different, there are parallels with my work, which, through the practice approach, seeks to understand cultural meanings, performers' skills and materialities, both of the practices the groups' endeavour to change and their means of doing so. The comparative approach enables me to decipher the place-specific influences, the different capacities of groups, and determine whether there are similarities between different areas of action in energy and food.

## **Transition**

I found the literature on Grassroots Innovations particularly relevant (for example, Haxeltine and Seyfang 2009, Seyfang and Haxeltine 2010, Seyfang et al. 2010a,b, Hargreaves et al. 2011). It provides the greatest attention to groups that are co-developing innovative practices, in contrast to work focusing on the impact of interventions on individuals' pro-environmental behaviours.

The Grassroots Innovations literature examines community-led action for sustainability as a site of socio-technical innovation — a radical niche and source of new ideas and solutions. They are defined as:

Innovative networks of activists and organisations that lead bottom-up solutions for sustainable development; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved. In contrast to the greening of mainstream business, grassroots initiatives tend to operate in civil society arenas and involve committed activists who experiment with social innovations as well as using greener technologies and techniques. (Seyfang and Smith 2007:585).

Work on Grassroots Innovations was born from the growing interest in shifting to sustainable production, consumption and managing innovation for adaptive societal transformation (Shove and Walker 2007, Foxon et al. 2009, Smith and Stirling 2010).

Within this, a Transition Management tool was developed in the Netherlands, aiming to help practitioners and policymakers to encourage sustainability transitions (see, for example, Geels 2002, Geels and Schot 2007). The model has been criticised for the deficient conceptualisation of the social, abstraction from historical technological transitions, and lack of attention to power relations, knowledges, vested interests, and the politics of actors (Genus and Coles 2007, Smith et al. 2010). Latterly, the model had been adapted to examine the social, such as the development of Grassroots Innovations (Seyfang and Smith 2007) and the Transition Movement (for example, Haxeltine and Seyfang 2009, Seyfang et al. 2010a,b, Hargreaves et al. 2011). In recognition of its technological roots, proponents advocated seeking insights from social practice theories and social movement theories (Seyfang et al. 2010a,b), which is examined further in the theoretical approach (2.2). These contributions are to aid their exploration of the role of civil society-based social movements in developing innovative social practices that can aid sustainability transitions through their diffusion (Seyfang et al. 2010a). The distinction might seem quite small, yet it is crucial to highlight my differing approach. I am interested in how the groups develop both innovative social practices, and the practices that facilitate their development, which I address further in the Naming the groups discussion.

The Grassroots Innovations work examined the Transition Movement and was particularly relevant, as there were three Transition groups in my local area. I noted the tendency to homogenise the movement, in contrast to the very different forms my local groups displayed. The Transition Movement offered insight into groups who are active in multiple projects, in contrast to more focused activities, such as community renewable energy or foraging. The Transition Movement model includes a core group which come together to represent individual projects in different action-areas such as food, energy, transport and campaigning, which are, to a degree, independent and led by individual teams. There are shared project concerns around Climate Change, Peak Oil, and building a resilient local community, with each project working toward the Energy Descent Plan developed by the group (Hopkins 2008b).

Seyfang and Haxeltine's (2010) study of Norwich and Wells (2011) study in New Zealand, found that Transition groups tended to focus on one area, frequently food-related endeavours. One of my local Transition groups concentrated on food whereas another engaged in multiple projects. These findings raised interesting areas for the cross-group comparison, such as understanding what was driving the focus of activities.

It would be useful to compare aims, skills, resources, materials, and other local factors, and whether there were benefits to the single activity or if it was hindering mobilisation. It would also be useful to explore how the local urban Transition groups were mobilising in comparison to rural/town Transition groups examined in the literature; who was participating and how, and what activities the groups were engaged in. Comparing Transition and non-Transition would also provide the opportunity to understand whether the Transition model was successful as a mobilising factor and what others, such as network-level resources or particular model-related practices, were aiding their growth.

A significant difference between Transition Movement and other local groups was the level of support and control by the Transition Network. The Transition Handbook (Hopkins 2008b) for practitioners describes ten steps of development and requirements to attain official status. These steps were designed to guide their actions, and ensured a level of consistency of action and message across the growing global network. I was curious to see how this impacted particular practices, and their longitudinal development, if and when the group followed this process.

One of my local (non-Transition) groups frequently discussed the potential benefits of joining the Transition Movement given the resources and structure it offered. Some felt positive, arguing it would help broaden the group's appeal and recruit those attracted to the Transition proposition, others wished to retain their independence. This discussion reiterated the importance of understanding the role of communications, reputation, networking and supportive resources, and the utility of comparing *how* it was being created, offered, and taken up (respectively) by the neighbouring groups.

The Transition model states that solutions are locally driven and dependent on local concerns (Hopkins 2008b). This mirrors the importance of place-specificity from other literatures and heightened my intrigue into how neighbouring groups, which had similar demographics and sustainability concerns, yet different aims, spaces and project ideas, would mobilise in similar and different ways. I considered a related issue. If place-specificities affect networks, capacity, resources, group practices, and members, then at what scale should this research endeavour to answer the research questions so that useful insights can be derived. The practice framework offers a way of approaching, through changing the scale of focus on practices and practice-bundles, as will be explained further in the next section.

The Transition Movement was the focus of growing literature beyond the Grassroots Innovations work. I found the critique of the Transition Movement provocative. The critique claims that it is operating at a tangent to mainstream environmentalism; a practical approach not focused upon political change (Barry and Quilley 2009) and disparaged by the left of the main environmental movement for its apolitical nature (Chatterton and Cutler 2008). North (2010) argues that historical examples demonstrate the need for political action to tackle the cause, not the effect. He points out the broad scale of change needed in the dominant capitalist system. Global environmental issues of climate change and peak oil are not post-political, political action is essential (ibid.). Rob Hopkins<sup>6</sup> counters by explaining that Transition Movement is complementary to direct protest, encouraging a different kind of political engagement via collaboration with local stakeholders and that, as adverse outcomes are inevitable, efforts are better focused on preparing local communities (Hopkins 2008a, 2010).

As discussed earlier, the growth of the Transition Movement confirmed that those who had previously not been active in community action were getting involved (Seyfang 2009a). Whilst in-depth exploration of motivations and previous involvement is lacking, and therefore included in this study, this finding suggests Hopkins is correct. My interest, therefore, given that the Transition Movement was attractive and growing, and other grassroots sustainability groups describe themselves as being part of the environmental movement, was on *how* they are mobilising and appealing to new members. Concerning the criticisms of the Transition Movement, I turn attention to *how* the grassroots sustainability groups (including Transition amongst other concerns and activities) are collaborating and effecting political change through different practices.

### **Learning about food**

At the outset of this thesis, I had no experience of either successfully growing food myself or of food growing grassroots sustainability groups' activities. I was aware, through discussions within the Energy group, of many thriving local food-related groups, and was excited to get involved.

One particular aspect that struck me from the discussions with participants was that of group culture. The Energy group, as previously mentioned, described itself as professional, in its culture and ways of working. They characterised the food-related

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<sup>6</sup> Rob Hopkins is one of the founders of the Transition Movement.

groups not only in different terms to themselves but also varying between the groups. Whilst grassroots sustainability groups were characterised as being community-led, alternative, innovative, and taking the initiative in the academic literature (expanded in the next sub-section), there was little attention to the finer details of culture and the practices that create it. Cultural practices affect recruitment and retention; therefore, I wanted to explore what attracts participants to a group, and perhaps to one group over another, and what encourages them to feel belonging and remain mobilised.

I found this was an area that social movement literature, in particular, could bring insight to, through the work on new social movements' culture and identity politics. Seyfang et al. (2010a) argue similarly, explaining the benefits of bringing social practice theories and social movement theories to Grassroots Innovations work, which I expand upon later, though this was a suggested research agenda rather than an empirical undertaking.

Before turning attention to the theoretical framework and contributions of social movement theories, I review the most influential work from the urban food, community gardens and foraging literature, which is similarly focused on single types of activities and is separate from the aforementioned literatures. From an ethnography-as-practice perspective, I performed this review in a more distanced way to the earlier literatures, due to my lack of experience and understanding of this aspect of the field. To tackle this, I engaged in an extended immersive participation stage early on during fieldwork to develop my familiarity with food growing and gathering practices.

## **Growing**

Before commencing this research, I was not familiar with the details of the differences in the aims and activities of my local groups involved in food. I knew there were concerns about reducing food miles, eating in season, and self-provisioning (growing in communal spaces and at home, and through foraging). This appeared to mirror the wide range of motivations I had heard during discussions within the Energy group, and I was keen to investigate further.

I noted that literature on food-growing was similar to community renewable energy literature, in that it frequently groups grassroots sustainability groups with other related structural forms. For example, work on alternative food networks (AFNs) considers organic food, ethical and fair-trade, and, most relevant to my project, local food and

urban agriculture (see, for example, Jarosz 2008). They are characterised by aspects such as the proximity between producers and consumers, new means of purchase, such as farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, sustainable food production, and consumption (ibid., McClintock 2014). Veen and Derkzen (2011) explain the expansion in forms from allotments to city farms, community gardens, and guerrilla gardening<sup>7</sup>, and how these practices communicate strategies of resistance, an alternative to the industrial food system. They highlight the debate over whether AFNs are 'spaces of defensive localism' (ibid.:1) and draw attention to the usual distinction in the literature of producers and consumers. The focus of the literature is more structural in scope — akin to the focus on protecting niches, and changing socio-technical systems discussed earlier.

The literature on community gardens proved useful, notably Cameron et al. (2010). They summarise the existing literature which, in a similar way to the literature on community energy, tends to ask questions around the benefits of community gardening, motivations for gardening, and whether it has become an instrument of neoliberal governmentality (ibid.). They summarise the benefits that are useful for comparison with other kinds of groups during analysis: health benefits (individual and collective, physical and mental, from food and exercise and being social), building social cohesion and networks, a way of learning about sustainability, and a way of promoting democracy (ibid.). I was aware that the food-related groups in the network were involved in food growing for themselves, and other groups. Training, both formal and informal, was another key practice, and akin to the behaviour change efforts of my local Energy group. I wanted to explore if participants across the groups highlighted similar or different benefits and motivations and, crucially, *how* practices of mobilisation contribute to their positive experiences of being involved.

Eizenberg (2004) describes community gardens as heterotopias (after Foucault), arguing they are a form of social struggle against the prevailing political, economic, and cultural arrangements of the urban environment, constructing alternative discourse and practices (ibid.). Cameron et al. (2010) also highlight how community gardens have arguably become a 'disciplining technology' to drive individual responsibility, which is similar to the earlier discussions of behaviour change and responsibilisation of community within the carbon reduction arena. This characterisation is another interesting area to

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<sup>7</sup> Guerrilla gardening is the act of gardening on land that the gardeners do not have the legal rights to cultivate, such as abandoned sites, areas that are not being cared for, or private property.

explore further: how grassroots sustainability groups engage in different activities, perceive and frame their actions, internally and to wider publics, and perform practices in relation to policy and government action.

One of the main differences between food-related groups and the Energy group was the use of a central project space (or multiple spaces in the context of foraging), and the embodied and material activities performed therein. I was interested in how these spaces, and the physical endeavours performed, were involved in the mobilisation of individuals and the food groups. My interest in the sensorial and emotional stemmed from my initial investigations and experiences of the food-related groups. However, the literature was lacking, and the everyday practices of communal growing are under-researched (Firth et al. 2011). There was a similar absence from the literature on energy: a focus on the individual bodily experiences of thermal comfort, for example, to the exclusion of communally performed practices of energy-related groups' endeavours.

### **Foraging**

I found very little academic literature on urban foraging in groups. The tendency was to examine it as an individual pursuit, as opposed to the communal and community behaviour-change inspired version practiced by my local grassroots sustainability group. However, there were some interesting findings in the literature to consider during analysis.

Jehlicka and Smith (2011), in their exploration of foraging as self-provisioning in Czech households, explain its role in sustaining connections between the rural and urban. Whilst this is rare in Western Europe, their finding that barter, mutual help, and gift-giving is important in family and friendship networks, was enlightening. In my local Foraging group, foraging was a communal activity, and an educational one with the aim of encouraging participants to forage independently. The sharing of foraged food was a central part of the excursion, with attendees contributing dishes they had made from foraged ingredients, and sharing ideas continued in the online group discussions. These observations drew my attention to the more emotive, social side, beyond networking (which can give the impression of being utilitarian) to the sharing, reciprocity, and tasting of food across the groups.

Corman (2011) examines the phenomena of freeganism, a form of urban foraging which gathers unused food, as political praxis. She draws attention to the negative perceptions

of their actions, as well as drawing an interesting parallel with the tension between humans and animals in the urban environment. The local Foraging group differed: it gathered growing vegetation. Nevertheless, this work highlighted that the local groups might be perceived negatively or be active alongside groups with different conceptions of how nature in the city should be utilised. I was also interested in competition for the use of space with other publics (human and non-human) — both within foraging, and also other groups, such as the NIMBY concerns faced by community energy projects — and how these issues shaped the mobilisation of the groups.

McLain et al. (2012) take a more structural perspective of edible landscapes in Seattle, akin to the socio-technical focus of multi-level perspective (for example, Geels 2002) and ‘systems of provision’ of Shove and Walker (2007, 2010). They explain how urban forestry provides a potential growth area for grassroots sustainability practice in the city, and how contextual factors such as institutional frameworks will need to shift, to move from the current form of foraging as a subversive practice to a legitimate one. They explain how groups influence policy arenas — acting as a bridge between the urban food (the city’s urban agriculture and food policy which was already concerned with food security) and urban forest management, to encourage linked structural change. They also highlight the benefits of residents in stewarding natural resources and interacting with nature (ibid.). In the UK, urban forestry research (by the government) was, at that time (2010-2012), focused on concerns such as the amenity value and health benefits of urban forests (Forestry Commission 2018). There was no sense of foraging being considered as a pathway to future sustainability, within policy or discourse in the UK. My local Foraging group, through their educational activities, were demonstrating multiple ways foraging could contribute, both through making use of produce and increasing future harvests through grafting on trees (explored in later chapters). This gap in policy and research focus, the exclusion of foraging (and other food practices) *within* considerations of how to reduce consumption and energy use, seemed to be somewhat of a blind-spot. Whilst it was perhaps unsurprising that efforts were focused on the more obvious means of reducing energy demand, namely through household practices, there were already concerns raised about the limited efficacy of making energy visible and the boomerang effect (Alfredsson 2004).

### **Learning from different kinds of action**

When considering the groups’ endeavours, I thought about their potential effects on the ultimate aims of changing practices and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. From my



marketing background, I considered each group's audiences, their relative size, and how compelling the messages are for energy, food growing, and foraging. Put simply, the effect on carbon reduction of moving from buying fruit flown-in from overseas to gathering one's own from extensive orchards in the city, might be smaller per person than addressing temperature norms in the home. However, if the message is more compelling than energy and the activity more social and fun (as well as other benefits such as making green space more attractive and encouraging the public to spend more time there), then the combined benefit may be more significant and require fewer resources to achieve.

It is beyond the remit of this study to offer measured answers to this comparison. Nevertheless, my attention was drawn to the variety of grassroots sustainability groups' aims, activities, effects and messages, and how individuals are active in, and influenced by, a multiplicity of groups. I also wanted to understand how groups are active in positively affecting their surroundings, physical and contextual, and how they are influenced by them.

Throughout the literature review, I found multiple insights that inspired areas of interest for further explanation. I was aware of the benefit of simply asking 'How?' to address some of the differences between current understandings and my observations in local groups. The review confirmed the benefit of the cross-group borough scale exploration, which would add insight into the heterogeneity of the groups and, through the ethnography, give greater attention to the changes in mobilisation over time. The review also highlighted the differences in descriptions of the groups between the individual literatures, which merited further consideration before deciding how I should refer to them as a collective.

## Naming the groups

Having noted the varying terminology used to describe the groups in each strand of literature, I needed to decide on a suitable cross-group description. Here I explain the choice of the phrase **grassroots sustainability groups**. This decision was a significant element of research practice, finalised alongside the research questions and literature review, and used when talking to, and about, the groups during research performance.

My thinking about terminology was influenced by how I conceptualised the field. This included my understanding of the field, relationship to it, the partial perspective I was producing, and spatialities of the field site. Massey (2003) explains the importance of epistemological assumptions, and, through a discussion of Rorty's arguments, the constraints of discourse and power of construction. The field is 'already linguistically constructed', and therefore the researcher's challenge is 'imaginatively to reformulate this construction in such a way that new avenues can be opened up, new ideas and practices can flow' (2003:77).

Naming matters, and I reviewed some of the terms used in the literature on groups. A variety of names are used, associated with the academic focus of the work. Examples include:

- Community Energy Initiatives, which focus on innovation in energy-related sustainability efforts (see, for example, Walker et al. 2007).
- Transition Towns and Transition Movement. Transition describes the group's aims and practices, acting as a powerful brand name. The language is highly spatialised with reference to varying scales; 'Transition Town, City, District, Village, Community or even Island' (Brangwyn and Hopkins 2008), with the most common being Transition Town, due to the network starting in small market towns (Hopkins 2008b). 'Transition Initiatives' is used within the daily email newspaper distributed by the Transition Network, is a more inclusive phrase, less focused on capturing spatial-scale, and more indicative of the resourcefulness and inventiveness of groups.
- Grassroots Innovations focuses on community-led sustainability solutions, how they create innovative new practices but struggle to scale up beyond small niches (Grassroots Innovations 2010). It considers the benefits of experiments and how to aid them in their expansion (see, for example, Seyfang and Smith 2007, Seyfang et al. 2010a,b), thus the innovation aspect is at the fore.
- Grassroots initiatives (for change) is used by Middlemiss and Parrish (2009). Their work examines the role of groups in encouraging low carbon behaviour practices. This terminology was the closest to mine and though I found groups themselves rarely used the term 'initiative', I appreciate it confers the inventiveness and capability of activities, which their research was evaluating.

This use of varied terminology continued beyond my fieldwork period, similarly associated with the research focus. Bradbury and Middlemiss (2014 and adopted from Smith 1997) use Grassroots Associations and examine the role of communities of practice such as workplaces, universities, and other organisations. Hobson et al. (2014) use Low Carbon Community Groups and explore the monitoring and evaluation processes within community groups concerned with increasing renewable energy and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. This phrase provides a useful differentiating term from, and examination of, earlier CRE work which groups a range of community-related action<sup>8</sup> together.

Law's discussion of the double life of social methods was informative, explaining they are both constituted by, and help to constitute, the social (Open University lecture 2011, Law et al. 2011). This account encouraged me to consider the research co-practitioners and wider influences such as policy contexts, and the co-constitutive relationship with research funding and methods. He explains that techniques have a purpose and, beyond social scientists, advocates who aid their propagation. They can result in what is invisible equating to what does not exist. Presumptions about the nature of people (at both single and collective levels) create social worlds and circulate them (ibid.). Thus, there is a 'triple lock' that keeps performed realities in place, constituted of three elements. First, researchers and the representations produced. Second, manifest realities (those described), collateral realities (those that are not thought about yet are embedded in the method) and realities performed. Third, the institutional context (including the advocates and circuits through which findings flow) (ibid.). The lock 'makes it very, very, difficult to know differently, to shape new realities, or to imagine different methods assemblages, or ways of knowing. For all of these have to be shifted together' (Law et al. 2011:13).

I did not endeavour to evaluate the contexts of the aforementioned research programs; indeed only the authors could offer insight into the complex influences on their work. However, this influenced my decision to use a different naming convention. I decided to frame research questions broadly, and use practice-informed ethnography across neighbouring groups, to disrupt the traditional focus on specific types of groups. Therefore, I did not want to presuppose the importance of innovation, the impact of groups, nor the structures and connections between them.

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<sup>8</sup> Including those located in, owned by, managed for and managed within the community.

I considered how the groups referred to themselves and how they were described in relation to other forms of sustainability-related action, such as efforts from councils and non-governmental organisations. This led to me using the phrase **grassroots sustainability groups**. The groups and their borough-wide network refer to themselves as **groups**, though their structures and levels of member involvement were found to vary significantly. Their shared concerns are expressed as centring on **sustainability**, with the word featuring in stated aims, objectives and materials, and frequently used by participants. **Grassroots** provided distinction — involving local people and driven by local politics — to other activities for, or located in, the community. Therefore, the phrase does not presuppose any particular academic research approach, policy or group effect, or action within a specific field.

Consequently, I use **grassroots sustainability groups** to describe this type of environmental action. However, each group discussed in the thesis has different sustainability-related aims and are involved in different kinds of action. To provide differentiation between the groups, I refer to their primary focus to remind the reader of these key differences.

The **Energy group**'s activities focus on carbon saving and renewable energy production in Muswell Hill. The **Nurture group** manages a project space with an orchard, a community building, food growing space, bee-hives, and encourages a multitude of community activities. The **Transition group** is a member group of the International Transition Network and was primarily focused on the **Urban Food group** (during fieldwork), which involved growing urban food and providing seedlings to other projects. The **Foraging group** is focused on foraging and grafting in public spaces in Haringey. The **Borough Network** is the formal borough-wide network encompassing all local sustainability groups.

The groups are introduced further in 3.3 with a summary of their forms of governance, the types of participation of their members, the kinds of spaces they use, and the range of activities they perform in Table 1. Having explored the current understanding of groups and settled on a suitable descriptive phase for them, I then turned attention to developing the theoretical framework to explore the groups during fieldwork and analysis.

## 2.2 Theorising mobilisation

In this section, I explain the theoretical approach. I discuss two literatures — social practice theories and social movement theories — utilised to develop my approach to explore the mobilisation of grassroots groups. As previously highlighted, I found no existing work on neighbouring groups involved in different sustainability-related concerns. The literatures explored in the previous section addressed different research questions, and tended to examine single types of groups, or geographically-distanced case studies. Each literature provided useful insights for further investigation. However, my work required its own theoretical approach, in line with the broad area of interest about *how* groups were mobilising.

Social practice theories and social movement theories were of particular interest from the outset. My experiences of mobilisation and research for my MSc thesis drew attention to community-led groups' innovative efforts to change behaviours and social practices, and the groups' understanding of their role in the environmental movement. This discussion is not an effort to synthesise, which is both impossible with such complex theories, but also undesirable, as their complementary nature and unique contributions would be lost. Instead, I explore the useful connections - the interplay and the crossovers - to contribute to my interpretations.

A social practice approach is ideal for asking the *how things are happening* question. I built on my previous knowledge of groups undertaking efforts to change practices. Examinations of sustainability-related practices had previously been limited to empirical studies of household practices or workplace practices (Hargreaves 2008, Hitchings 2009, Strengers 2010). I concluded there was potential for using the approach in a complementary way; to examine how groups, communally, were encouraging changes in practices and examine the practices they were employing to mobilise members, the groups themselves, and wider stakeholders. I wanted to extend to comparing practices in different groups and temporal developments through ethnography.

My grassroots sustainability groups described themselves as part of the environmental movement, and local Transition groups part of the growing Transition movement. In the literature, the Transition Movement is widely referred to as a social movement (see, for example, Barry and Quilley 2008, Haxeltine and Seyfang 2009, Connors and McDonald

2010, Seyfang et al. 2010 a,b, Smith 2011). Thus theories of social movements are a natural complementary partner for investigating the practices of mobilisation. Social movement theories provide a particular understanding of macro-contextual influences, to which to compare this mobilisation to other kinds of mobilisation, and provide detailed examination of spaces of contention, thus giving considerable attention to the geographies of grassroots sustainability groups.

There are connections between social practice and social movements in the literature. There are suggestions within Grassroots Innovations literature (Seyfang and Hexaltine 2010, Seyfang et al. 2010a) that contributions from social practice and social movement could be fruitfully employed together to improve understanding of Grassroots Innovations. Whilst I have not explicitly used the same approach and the starting point of understanding groups as innovative niches, this argument struck a chord. Within the social movement literature is a reciprocal call for greater focus on social practices to advance understanding of movements (Crossley 2002). I examine these relationships between the literatures and explain which elements were useful for research design.

The following discussion is split into three sections. First, I explain the social practice model utilised (Shove et al. 2012) to explore the practices of mobilisation of grassroots sustainability groups. I discuss differentiations between practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance (Schatzki et al. 2001, Shove et al. 2009, 2012), understandings of how practices are grouped (Schatzki 2011), and their temporalities (Røpke 2009). Second, I explain the contributions from social movement theories that I found useful for drawing attention to particular mobilisation factors: discussions of the contextual, cultural, and geographical influences. Third, I draw attention to the crossovers of social practice theories and social movement theories in the literature. I highlight the considerations they inspired for developing the research design, developing the research questions, and performance of conducting research.

# Theories of social practice

I briefly introduced social practices in 2.1. Here I discuss the theories of practice, the features of practices and relationships between them. Whilst there is no single social practice theory, the social and collective formation, organisation and development of practices are central to all. Such practices can be seen as cultural assemblages that influence people's actions, perceptions, and interpretations of social life and are carried, replicated, and changed through performance. Røpke (2009) explains the roots of theories of practice come from sociologists (such as Giddens's Theory of Structuration (1986) and Bourdieu's writings on Habitus (1998)), cultural theorists, and philosophers. For a more extensive discussion of the development of theories of practice see Warde 2005, Røpke 2009, and Shove 2010. These early approaches are criticised for omitting consideration of the material as an element of practice, which is included in the more recent formulations developed by Schatzki et al. (2001), Reckwitz (2002) and Shove and Pantzar (2005).

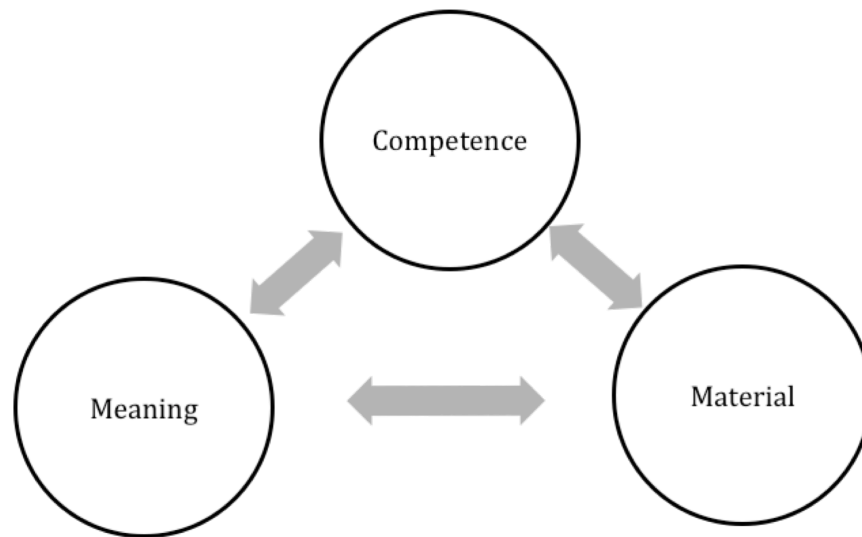
Seyfang et al. (2010a) explain the features of the more recent practice approaches:

- Practices include various knowledges, skills, understandings, and forms of emotional attachment, and are performed repeatedly. They become embedded and embodied within practitioners. This means these features belong to the practices themselves, rather than just existing in the mind of the practitioner.
- Practices involve the integration of human, non-human, social, and technical.
- Practices are the key unit of analysis and not the individuals or social structures.

Within this thesis, I considered mobilisation as a practice (or practice bundle), and the change-agents as practitioners, rather than the end behavioural impacts, as previously examined in the application of social practice theory to pro-environmental behaviours. Here I draw attention to the aspects of understanding of social practices that were useful for developing my research. I consider the details of the elements of a practice; then the practitioners of practice, and practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance. I discuss the arrangements of multiple practices (such as in a complex set of mobilisation practices), and finally broaden the perspective to the general categorisation of dispersed and integrative practices, to which all practices belong.

## Elements of practice

I used the formulation of practice and its constituent elements from Shove et al. (2012).



**Figure 1: Elements of practice**

(adapted by author of this thesis from Figure 2.1 on page 25 in Shove et al. 2012).

Materials are described as ‘objects, infrastructures, tools, hardware and the body itself’ (Shove et al. 2012:23), ‘things, technologies, tangible physical entities and the stuff of which objects are made’ (2012:14). Competences are ‘multiple forms of understanding and practice knowledgeability’, ‘skills, know-how and technique’ (ibid.). Meanings are ‘the social and symbolic significance of participation at any one moment’; symbolic meanings, ideas and aspirations (ibid.). The authors acknowledge that this is the most difficult of their simplifying categorisations, as there is less agreement on the characterisation of meaning, emotions, and motivation. Meaning integrates ‘teleoaffective’ structures (ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions and moods (Schatzki 1996:89)) within practice, a ‘timespace’ organisation and ordering (with practices having history and setting) and future orientation within each practice performance.

To understand changing configurations of practice, Shove et al. (2012) track the trajectories of elements and the making and breaking of links between them, explaining that this allows them to understand change and stability without prioritising agency or structure. They describe them as proto-practices, practices, and ex-practices (ibid.), and that ‘practices emerge, persist, shift and disappear’ (2012:14). I found this useful when considering practices being actively changed in the pursuit of sustainability, and the



more mundane practices; those which create, recruit, retain, and support the groups. I was also curious to explore whether there were practices which were no longer performed, as I had noticed a gradual shift in my energy practices during mobilisation of my local Energy group.

### **Practices and their practitioners**

As a route through the agency/structure divide, practices refer to people as carriers (Reckwitz 2002) or practitioners (Schatzki et al. 2001, Shove and Pantzar 2005). Their role is as 'body/minds who "carry" and "carry out" social practices' (Reckwitz 2002:256). I found this crucial given the focus in this research on practices performed communally, and in the pursuit of both communal and individual change in practice performance.

Røpke (2009) interrogates the relationship between distinct practices and their temporal dynamism, asking how they 'recruit' practitioners, how practitioners handle combinations of practices in everyday life, how practices develop, and how practices cease to recruit participants. With practices constrained by resources, being spatially situated, co-performed by human and non-human 'partners', and reliant on 'coupling and uncoupling of the paths of [...] these "partners"', he concludes 'social reproduction is thus based on the intersection in time and space of institutional projects and individual paths' (2009: 2493). Biographies impact how people combine practices, management of which is likened to a puzzle; emerging from practices, projects and influenced by their accumulated experiences and dispositions (ibid.). I found this helpful when thinking about the wide variety of practices involved and how they come together to mobilise members, and the dynamic trajectories of members and other (non-human) factors in the mobilisation of the groups. Hards (2011) explains how environmental values are affected by the performance of practices. In the context of groups, exploring this co-constitutive relationship — that of biography affecting, and being affected by, one's participation in practices — is crucial. It helps understand why people come, stay, go, and how does it fit within their wider repertoire of activism and lifestyle.

Another consideration in relation to the practitioner of practices was that, with practices as the unit of analysis, the body/mind is implicated in doings and sayings (both language and kinaesthetic means), practical understandings (necessary abilities and skills), rules, teleoaffective structure (ends, projects and tasks), and general understandings (Schatzki et al. 2001, Valtonen et al. 2010). In the context of groups and

practitioners spending time together, this particularly draws attention to the emotional, sensorial, and bodily aspects of mobilisation — both the individual experiences and the effects on group development, culture, and longevity. Furthermore, on the non-human side, particularly in groups that are working to change project spaces, how are human and non-human relations implicated? This is an area that was interesting for me to explore further, through participation, observation, and talking to members about their experiences, discussed further in the next chapter.

### **Different types of practices**

A useful distinction made by Schatzki (1996, 2001) and Shove et al. (2009, 2012) is that of practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance. Practice-as-entity is a configuration of elements that endure over space and time. The practice-as-performance is the integration of the elements performed in a specific situation, and therefore slightly differently in each performance. The practice-as-entity relies on regular performance to exist, and it is the shifting of elements and links in each performance that means it changes over time. From a methodological perspective, my approach was useful for understanding the spatial and temporal differences and developments; ethnography of neighbouring groups allowed me to examine the similarities and differences between similar practices in the groups, and how they endured, or changed, through my repeated visits.

Schatzki (2011) explains how the practices are grouped, ‘a bundle is a set of linked practices and arrangements and a constellation is a set of linked bundles’ (2011:5); constellations are larger and possibly more complex sets of bundles and ‘more complex linkage of practices and arrangements’ (2011:6). ‘The difference between constellations of bundles and local or single bundles is primarily a difference in spatial-temporal extension (greater and lesser density and complexity do not necessarily align with larger and smaller, respectively)’ (2011:8). The links are varied; they include shared elements such as the collaborative task, for example, multiple different activities performed in pursuit of the mobilisation of members. Practices can also be linked via their performance being dependent on another practice; such as the division of tasks amongst the core members of a grassroots sustainability group. Or through chains of action over time; thus the change in weather at a volunteering day triggers a set of different practices to be performed. Practices are linked by sharing the same doings and sayings — though the aims diverge (ibid.); such as a core member seeking funding versus volunteers working together on a gardening project. Thus practices are linked in

timespaces, in which ends being pursued, or contexts in which they are performed, are shared. This nuanced understanding of the links between practices was useful when approaching the fieldwork in a mobilisation-as-practice-constellation and multi-location, multi-group setting; as existing empirical contributions tended to focus on single practices or single locations.

Schatzki (1996) distinguishes between two types of practice, dispersed practices and integrative practices. Dispersed practices are ‘widely dispersed among different sectors of social life’ (1996: 91). They are sets of doings and sayings mainly linked by the understanding of the practice which includes knowing how to perform it, identifying and attributing the practice (to oneself and others), and being able to prompt or respond to the practice (ibid.). Examples include describing, ordering, explaining, imagining (ibid.). Integrative practices are the ‘more complex practices found in and constitutive of particular domains of social life’ (1996:98). They are also sets of doings and sayings, joined through understandings and particular ‘sensitised’ understandings of the transfigured forms that dispersed practices adapt when they are integrated. He cautions that integrative practices are not simply dispersed practices added together, but rather multiple dispersed practices that meet, and which are transformed through their incorporation, dependent on the context and the understandings imbued within that particular integrative practice. He later explains ‘dispersed practices weave through integrative ones and are often colonized by the latter and transformed in character’ (Schatzki 2005:481). The examples given are business practices, celebration practices, cooking practices, and recreational practices amongst others (ibid).

This distinction was useful in a complementary way and helps to conclude this section. I previously highlighted the focus on efforts to change practices and the practices that come together in groups to aid that change. Mobilisation is a complex bundle of practices, a constellation tied to other constellations. The key question in fieldwork is where to focus and what scale to choose for exploration of practices. I argue that an ethnographic approach allows experimentation of scale. The other aspect of this work is deciphering what are the elements of practice, practices, or bundles of practice that are most enlightening in understanding mobilisation. Thinking through practices, comparing their performances within different groups, and also relating them to other fields, is a useful way of establishing what it is about them that is aiding mobilisation in the sustainability field. Thus communication, for example, a dispersed practice, occurs in a particular way in professional settings (which I am familiar with) and occurs in

similar ways in the Energy group. How does it occur in the other groups and how does this link to other practices of culture and identity formation? What other practices is it linked to? What chains of practices does it set in motion? How are practitioners recruited, and how do biography, body and mind co-constitute the performance? Is it communication styles that are important, or are there other salient practices, or sub-practices within communication (such as how tea and cake are shared) that are more important?

I explored grassroots sustainability mobilisation fruitfully through the social practice approach by bearing in mind these elements of practice, practitioners, and performances, the links between them, and comparisons of performances. This social practice framework was directed by key insights from the social movement literature that related to my experiences of mobilisation and areas of focus for the empirical work, to which I now turn attention.

## **Theories of social movements**

Here I explain the contribution of social movement theories. As discussed earlier, in this thesis I conceive of grassroots sustainability groups as a mobilisation and part of the environmental movement. Given the growth of the groups, their expression of a wave of 'new <sup>9</sup>environmentalism' (Connors and McDonald 2010) and the scale of social transformation envisioned, insights from social movement analyses were a natural tool for exploration.

I use an inclusive definition of social movements as:

Collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part. (Snow et al. 2004:11)

There is no single social movement theory, just as there is no single social practice theory. There are multiple theories, including collective behaviour, resource mobilisation, political process theory, collective action frames and new social

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<sup>9</sup> Defined as focusing on 'the collaboration of individuals, communities, government and business in taking issues-based action' (2010:2).

movements, and more recent efforts to synthesise them. During my reading, there were elements from within these literatures that resonated with my experience of mobilisation and with the practice approach. I saw a symbiotic relationship between the social practice literature and social movement literature in the context of my research questions.

First, the social practice framework provides a means of exploring mobilisation and of delving into the detail of how grassroots sustainability groups mobilise. I hope this generates insights for other kinds of mobilisations and suggests a beneficial approach for further social movement analysis. There was some previous limited discussion of the connections between social practice and social movements in the academic literature, discussed in the following section.

Second, as my research questions are broad, and the social practice approach can be turned to a multiplicity of practices and scales, our existing understanding of social movements is a useful means of directing initial attention to this empirical example of mobilisation. This direction was a light touch - I did not aim to answer the questions via an examination of political-process practices, for example. Instead I paid attention to factors that are known to affect movements to establish their relevance in the mobilisation of grassroots sustainability groups. I also wanted to explore the significance across the groups in order to make more generalised interpretations.

Here I highlight some of the resonances between social practice theory and social movement work for further investigation in the groups. They include groups' resources, communication, culture, and perspectives on the geographies of mobilisation, which brings attention to spaces of action and their place in wider networks.

### **Resource mobilisation, at multiple scales**

Seyfang et al. (2010a) highlight the utility of resource mobilisation theory, though also refer to recent criticisms of it relying on the 'rational actor model of social agents' (2010a:10). Whilst it has been critiqued for being a reductive checklist of resources to evaluate, I found it useful for exploring the multiple forms of resources involved in practices. A five-fold typology is proposed (Edwards and McCarthy 2004 in Bate et al. 2005):

1. Moral (legitimacy, solidarity, support)
2. Cultural (artefacts and cultural products)

3. Social-organisational (infrastructures, social networks)
4. Human (labour, experience, skills)
5. Material resources (financial and physical capital)

I found this useful when examining the context of grassroots sustainability group mobilisation and, particularly, combining it with consideration of resources at a number of scales. This typology of resources, when thinking them through the social practice framework, resonates with competence, meaning, and materials of practices. It relates to practitioners, resources available in the place-specific spaces of action, and the practices I saw in groups such as networking, and building culture and belonging (discussed below). Crucially practice theory attunes us to the interplay; of resources available and affecting groups' mobilisation and those created and affected by the groups' mobilisation, at multiple scales.

This work also links to the discussion in grassroots sustainability literature of forms of community capacity (Middlemiss and Parrish 2009) — which helps delve into the social-organisational, and cultural, elements in the typology. Seyfang et al. (2010a) refer to the benefit of considering resources to support innovative niches. Whilst not overtly mentioned in the typology, the resources of local place (borough and the locale of each group) and spaces of groups' activities are also crucial to consider; and are discussed in relation to frames and geographies of contention.

### **Collective action frames and my focus on communication**

Benford and Snow (2000) discuss collective action frames, explaining how they had become<sup>10</sup> perceived as just as important to understand the character and development of social movements as resource mobilisation and political processes. The social movement literature on frames was heavily influenced by Goffman (1974), which was also influential in the neo-interpretative genre of social practice theory (Rasche and Chia 2009). Rasche and Chia summarise Goffman's contribution to practice theory, explaining that he understands frames, which are necessary for situational interpretations, as a collective phenomenon (ibid.). Furthermore, that frames 'allow actors to follow social practices to create social order and at the same time the identity of the individual' (2009:12). Social movement literature, whilst not explicitly using the later social practice frameworks, or terminology, examines these processes within social

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<sup>10</sup> They explain there had been a recent proliferation of academic work on collective action frames at that time of publication (2000).

movements.

Of particular interest is the origin of frames and how they diffuse, and how they vary in key ways — summarised as:

- Problem identification and the direction or locus of attribution
- Flexibility and rigidity, inclusivity or exclusivity of a frame
- Variation in interpretation scope and influence
- Resonance (certain frames will work better or more effectively than others)

(Benford and Snow 2000).

When considering communication in grassroots sustainability groups, analysis of framing brings further contribution and detail to exploring ideologies, discursive practices at groups' activities and mediated communications. Benford and Snow's (2000) identification of how frames vary can be usefully turned into questions to ask in the analysis; how are problems identified, how inclusive is the frame, and so on.

Benford and Snow (2000) also highlight areas that warrant further enquiry, including the discursive and narrative processes generative of collective action frames, and the relationship between naming and emotions. Here, the practice framework is particularly helpful; I can understand *how* these frames come about and change to a greater level of detail, the practices involved in their evolution, and their use in communications. Framing, therefore, becomes a practice-bundle, the elements of which can be explored in detail, and the role of the bundle in constellations of practices of mobilisation (from the individual up to the international networks of groups) can also be explored (Schatzki 2011). The issue of emotions is addressed by turning attention to the new social movement work.

### **New social movements and culture**

Early work, such as resource mobilisation and political process theory, was critiqued as overly rationalist and structural, with a macro-political orientation (Osterweil et al. 2008). This critique resulted in a 'cultural turn' with calls for exploration of emotion, affect, identity (previously considered 'irrational') and new methodology; therefore ethnographic tools and analysis to focus on meaning-making, cultural practices, ideologies, and narratives used by movements themselves (ibid.). These areas of focus can be seen in the study of new social movements such as environmentalism and peace activism (see, for example, Melucci 1995). Goodwin and Jasper (2004) critique the

earlier models, arguing commitment to *a priori* frameworks result in researchers finding what they expect. They also find fault with more culturally-focused analyses, warning against the reductive treatment of culture that using the concept of (for example) 'frames' encourages. They conclude 'framing' simply becomes added to the list of variables by assuming mobilisation to be the main goal of any social movement, and thus frames are merely an instrumental way of achieving this goal (ibid.). Instead, they encourage examination of the affective, emotive, and historical aspects of movements and their cultures, identities, beliefs, and ideologies (ibid.).

It is precisely these aspects they describe which I explore in my research. The benefit of the practice approach here is that it encourages a deeper dive into the culture, the effects on participation, and the multifaceted role within the groups and beyond. The practice approach embeds culture within the exploration of group mobilisation; as an outcome of multiple practices and as an effect on them through the elements of practice and the links between practices. It brings attention to the development of cultures (across the groups) over time, how practitioners, other practices, and changing contextual factors affect — and are affected — by it. It brings attention to the human understanding of culture, and also embodied experiences, the material, and non-human co-practitioners. I was aware of the individual groups' cultures, and a shared identity within the Borough Network, and connections with other networks and roles in wider collaborations. I was therefore interested in how cultures are implicated in mobilisation at different scales.

With culture comes the reputation of the groups, and their call-to-action. These are conveyed verbally, face-to-face, and also in mediated communications and virtual environments. I explore how culture is expressed (through different spaces and voices) and evolves; here the comparison of groups brings a more nuanced understanding.

### **Networks and geographies of social movements**

Social movements are described in terms of networks; "A social movement is a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations" (Diani 1992:11). Saunders (2007) explored the forms of networking that occur between environmental organisations within London, arguing that their lack of collaboration and information-sharing meant that they lacked a shared movement identity. She later extends this argument to argue that the environmental movement is better conceived of as an environmental network, rather than a movement, due to this lack of shared identity (Saunders 2013). My initial experiences of the groups in Haringey were contrary to her



findings; with a shared identity built through their co-created borough-wide network, and successful sharing of information and resources.

I was curious to understand the intricacies of the networking and formal networks in which the groups were active, and their role in the mobilisation of grassroots sustainability groups. Social networks are crucial within the groups, and there are networks between groups, and multiple formal networks supporting them. There is spatiality to these networks, to their development, and there are communicative and cultural connections, and knowledges (of practice) that travel through them. From the social practice approach comes details of the practices of networking, their effects on mobilisation and, co-constitutively, on networking practice through the mobilisation of individuals, groups, and networks.

My knowledge of the groups and their connections via the borough-wide network in Haringey highlighted the relevance of place and spaces of grassroots action. Whilst the importance of place-specificity is, perhaps, evident in the aforementioned social movement theories, Miller (2000) critiques them for a lack of detailed exploration of the geographies of contention. Miller advocates an explicitly geographical approach, exploring the anti-nuclear movement in three boroughs of Boston, providing a revealing evaluation of the role of geography (space, place and scale) in explaining the distinct manifestations of action (Miller 2000). Nicholls (2009) connects place to networks, discussing how place affects their functions, their strong and weak ties, drawing attention to how my groups in Haringey are both place-related but relational at different scales.

The issue of place and space is particularly relevant for grassroots sustainability groups; they are creating new spaces, are operating in specific communities and they are also simultaneously part of wider networks and the broader environmental movement with global concerns. I explore the place-specificities of culture, resources and frames through the neighbouring group comparison, and contribute a multi-scalar exploration — from the geographies of individual members through to the extent of the networks and collaborations of the groups. The practice framework examines how these affect — and are affected — by mobilisation, itself a multi-scalar constellation of practice-bundles, performed within group spaces.

### **In the field with synthesised social movement theory**

As drawn attention to by Seyfang et al. (2010a), social movement theories have been synthesised in more recent empirical application to produce a more productive analytical tool which overcomes the critiques that centre around each separate theory omitting consideration of other factors. The synthesised approach has been used in new areas such as creating large-scale modification in the NHS (Bate et al. 2005) and citizenship and development (Leach and Scoones 2007). This work demonstrates the potentially rich application, beyond use in old (for example, labour) or new (for example, environmentalism) social movements, and that seeking social movement insights in relation to grassroots groups does not rely on them having pre-identified characteristics. I found this useful as grassroots sustainability groups may or may not have similarities to previous forms of social movement; as discussed previously in 2.1, Transition has both been claimed to be a movement (for example, Hopkins 2008a,b) and critiqued as not fulfilling the typical features of one (for example, North 2009).

This synthesis is beneficial for exploring wider influences (such as resources and political processes) and cultural aspects (such as framing, identity and social networks) implicated in mobilisation. Perhaps inevitably when applying learning from social movement theories to new fields, the current approach is a little uncritical and falls into the aforementioned reductive trap. However, it remains helpful as long as one bears in mind the place of culture within a movement. Ethnographic studies of social movements highlight the need to avoid false separation between culture and structure; instead appreciating that structural and political causes are situated and discursively constructed, and that cultures are embedded, not adjuncts (Osterweil 2008). In addition, as Miller (2000) and Nicholls (2009) argue, explanations of movements, and their cultures, must be more geographically emplaced.

I considered these insights from the vast body of work on social movement literature as a means of gently directing the fieldwork and analysis. They drew attention to particular areas of interest for further exploration through the practice framework. These ideas are discussed further, in my interpretations of materials generated, within the rest of this thesis.

# Connecting theories of social practice and social movements

In the previous two sections, I discussed how social practice theories and social movement theories help explore mobilisation of grassroots sustainability groups. The arguments discussed here suggest that both theories could contribute fruitfully to the fieldwork, and they highlight specific areas for consideration. Crossley's (2002) discussion of practices and social movements refers to the (earlier work of) Bourdieu (1984), rather than the version of practice theory I use within the research framework, of Shove et al. (2012). My intention, therefore, was to be receptive to where the interplay between the two is most productive in aiding interpretations during analysis. I return to a discussion of the benefits of exploring the contributions of each to the interpretations developed in the final chapter.

## From the social movement literature

From the social movement literature, Crossley (2002) provides a detailed theoretical synthesis, arguing that Bourdieu's theory of practice provides the glue needed to bring the dispersed findings from social movement theories together. His rationale is that Bourdieu brings coherent theorisation of structure, agency and the connection between, thus providing a framework for the examination of social movements (ibid.).

Crossley (2002) cites Bourdieu's equation ' $[(\text{habitus}) + (\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$ ' (1984:101). His interpretation is that social practices are a result of the 'interaction of agents, who are both differently disposed (**habitus**) and unequally resourced (**capital**), within the bounds of specific networks which have a game-like structure (**field**) and which impose definite restraints upon them' (2002:171), emphasis added myself. He draws this together with Bourdieu's underlying assumption that change is characteristic of social structures. This practice framework, he concludes, provides tools to:

Make sense of the basic preconditions of movement emergence and development.

An analysis of fields and their various interactions allows us to make sense of the strains, opportunities, resource flows, etc., which can give rise to movements (...) to conceptualize the diverse and differentiated range of arenas in which movements wage their struggles [where] in each case they will encounter a different 'game' which demands different dispositions and resources from them [and] that the internal environment of a movement may assume a field structure,

and that there is, within our society, a more permanent field of movement and political activism, a political field, wherein various movements stake their claim. (Crossley 2002:183)

Building on the lack of explicit Bourdieusian explanation of how habitus drives one towards activism and how habitus is transformed as a result, Crossley describes this political engagement as 'radical habitus'. Explaining that, once involved, activists remain in the 'field' of contention through 'durable dispositions' (2003:51) and that the disposition is created, developed, and structured through engagement in activism, thus ensuring that activism as social practice continues. Habitus (habits, dispositions and skills) sensitises me to the importance of biography. This includes previous exposure to formative political encounters that, given that the claimed *raison d'être* of some grassroots sustainability groups is to be less political, may have been positive or negative. 'Radical habitus', biographies and prior political perspectives that influence activism (Crossley 2003) are helpful for exploring the new and widening mobilisation, and they also draw attention to explanations of on-going individual mobilisation and the longevity of the groups.

As Rasche and Chia (2009) explain, Bourdieu's influence on practice theory is fundamental, and they describe it as an earlier neo-structuralist understanding of practice. Crossley's argument for applying practice theory to social movements is compelling and, whilst my work employs the second wave of theory work (i.e. Shove et al. 2012), 'radical habitus' is a useful conceptual reference when analysing how practitioners describe their participation, and how habitus is acquired.

Osterweil et al. (2008) criticise social movement theories for objectifying movements and searching for generalisable causal explanations for how they emerge, grow, work, and decline. Their contention with the 'cultural turn' is that culture becomes mechanised as a variable that explains behaviour. Thus they call for learning from other fields; using social practice to consider movements as creating 'their own forms of social practice, even habitus, and constituting their own figured worlds' (2008:45). They engage with movements as actors providing explanations and knowledges in the form of stories, ideas, ideologies and expertise. They use habitus to explain this 'knowledge-practice': knowledge creation, reformulation and diffusion, arguing that recognition of movements as spaces and processes where knowledges are created, developed, and circulated by diverse actors, enables political insights to be uncovered which are often

not grasped (ibid.). Again, whilst their use of habitus means the connection to practice theory is firmly in the neo-structuralist camp (and the work of Bourdieu), knowledge-practice is important to consider through the recent social practice theories. Knowledge is implicated in all practices and movements develop distinct practices of creating knowledges; in activities, power relations, and politics crucial to their operation. In the context of grassroots sustainability groups, this draws my attention to diverse knowledge and practice relations. They include the co-created knowledges in sustainability-related innovations, the knowledge-practices themselves, and the knowledges-within-practices. I explore their contribution to group mobilisation, their co-constitutive relations with wider publics, networks and collaborators, and relations with dispersed practices, which coalesce as integrative practices within the groups.

### **From the Grassroots Innovations literature**

I found the discussion within Grassroots Innovations resonated with my thinking about the utility of contributions from both social practice and social movement literature, particularly given the groups within that body of literature cross over with those in this study. Furthermore, while I am focused on the groups' underlying mobilisation practices, the group members concentrate on the results, challenging existing systems as well as offering innovative sustainable solutions to hard-to-change systems of provision (which this literature discusses).

Some of the lead proponents of the Grassroots Innovations literature argue (in Seyfang et al. 2010a) that to further the body of literature, it would be fruitful to bring social practice theory and social movement theory into their approach. They first explain the deficiencies in their current model and how it fails to understand civil society's role in sustainability transitions. Civil society's role, they argue, is to produce innovative ideas and practices in order to create effects on demand-side factors and consumption. They propose that to improve understanding, and therefore the expansion of Grassroots Innovations, they need to look to social practice theory to understand the spreading of innovation, and to social movements to understand how to grow niches. They explain that social practice approaches bring focus on the doing of innovative practices, how they evolve in different spaces, with innovation derived from both social and technical elements of the socio-technical processes, and agency distributed throughout the assemblages. Grassroots Innovation niches, therefore, provide opportunities where 'oppositional and experimental practices might more easily be assembled' (ibid.:9). Contribution from practice theory enables the opening up of the black box of

innovation; through exploration of how assemblages are made via the recruitment of practitioners, their ability to change practices and localised experiences of performing and evolving practices. They argue social movement theories contribute in two ways. Resource Mobilisation theory provides an analysis of *how* available resources are utilised by civil society to lobby for regime change. New Social Movement theory, with its focus on *why* macro-social structures produce social movements, explores the culture and identity politics involved, as well as the framing processes and the interactive social processes involved in mobilisation. Therefore, social movement theory complements the Grassroots Innovations approach by widening the perspective into the context of longer-term social change in which multiple landscape pressures are occurring. This creates new structural, political, and cultural conditions that may stimulate the emergence of new movements (ibid.).

The perspective of Grassroots Innovations, and therefore the aim of Seyfang et al.'s (2010a) research agenda, is to provide greater granularity and support to the innovative niches. I share the sentiment of the need to explore the practices within groups, culture and identity concerns and their broader context (resources, broader landscape pressures and social change). My starting point is a little different, as described, turning attention both to the innovations of groups as well as the details of how they mobilise and are sustained.

Despite it appearing evident that social movements engage in multiple practices, and the understanding of which would shed light on the development of such movements, there has been relatively little exploration of social practice theories and social movement theories together. Social movement theorists suggest conceptualising movements as where new social practices develop is helpful for understanding cultures, knowledge-practices and politics, and that Bourdieu's theory of practice adds the ideal framework to social movement analyses (such as Crossley 2002, 2003, Osterweil et al. 2008). Grassroots Innovations advocate future synthesis of the multilevel perspective, social practice, and social movement contributions (Seyfang et al. 2010a).

In this thesis, I proposed, and found, fruitful interpretations from the interplay between understandings of social practices and social movements. By utilising the more cultural aspects of social movement understanding, and the drivers of change and socio-spatial relations, in conjunction with social practice theory, it was possible to provide more powerful explanations.

## 2.3 Practice-ing the research questions

Here I discuss the research questions introduced in chapter 1 through the theoretical approach developed in the previous section: the practice lens, framed by social movement literature. To address **how are grassroots sustainability groups mobilising?** I explored three questions, which turn attention to individuals, the groups, and their place in wider networks.

### 1 How and why are people participating?

This focuses on the individual as a practitioner of practices within the group. It delves into their motivations for joining, the practices performed in different modes of participation, the impacts of their involvement on practices beyond the group (and vice-versa), and how these change over time. It asks participants about their biographies — their habitus — and how they understand mobilisation practices and their performance, as a co-practitioner in the group.

This exploration builds on the current understandings of individual mobilisation in groups, discussed in community renewable energy, Transition, and community gardening literature. It provides a more detailed understanding of the reasons whereby both seasoned community activists and the inexperienced are participating. Participants' experiences of the practices groups use to mobilise, contributes to understandings of grassroots sustainability groups as part of the environmental movement. It establishes the key practices for further investigation.

### 2 What are the groups' practices of mobilisation?

This concentrates on the group as a practitioner of practices encouraging mobilisation. Building on the practices understood by individuals, it examines the practices performed to mobilise the group. Areas for consideration include what practices groups co-perform when together, and the practices that maintain the group outside of their face-to-face activities. The question examines how they are performed similarly, and differently, in neighbouring groups.

This exploration builds upon current understandings of social movement mobilisation, by identifying how practices are performed, to encourage initial, and ongoing, group mobilisation. I explore socio-spatial and temporal dynamics, materiality and the body, and the senses and emotions invoked. For the individual literatures on grassroots

sustainability groups, it seeks to contribute a more detailed comparison of how recruitment and retention of participants in neighbouring groups occurs. I aim to identify how practices help and hinder development by comparing the practices across groups.

### 3 How do grassroots sustainability groups mobilise beyond the group?

This draws attention to the group as a practitioner of practices within the broader context of multiple groups and networks mobilising. It asks how groups mobilise and are mobilised by their connections to each other, with their local council and other actors (such as businesses and NGOs).

This exploration builds on discussions of types of practices, how they are situated and how they coalesce, by focusing in, and drawing out, on group practices to explore the connections between them. It seeks to identify the most useful scale for answering the research questions. It conceives mobilisation as a constellation of practice-bundles, a co-constitutive triumvirate of practices, practitioner, and performances, which intersects with constellations of practices of other groups, networks and publics (Schatzki 2011). For literatures on groups, it provides an understanding of how they create their territory of action, and the influences they have on their creation and protection.

Together, these three perspectives of individuals, the groups and their internal workings, and their wider connections and contexts — through the practice-lens — provide the framework for further understanding of how grassroots sustainability groups are mobilising. In particular, the ethnographic approach will provide both the cross-group comparison and a more detailed temporal perspective. Together these contribute to greater understanding of the spatiality of this particular form of social movement, the development of mobilisation over time.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explained how my initial research ideas developed into the research framework. My work was driven by concerns about sustainability and, given my previous marketing experience, how to encourage it effectively. As an activist, I saw the potential for groups to grow, to encourage communities to make small steps towards sustainability and resilience, and their capacity to influence neighbours and businesses.



My focus is the detail of how mobilisation occurs, rather than the evaluation of the positive effects of single kinds of groups, which is the scope of much of the current literature (as discussed in 2.1).

My principal research interests coalesced around:

- Motivations and involvement of participants and the groups, having observed they were varied, multiple and evolving.
- Impacts on individual and group practices. How groups were affecting both sustainability-related practices and others, and how group practices were developing.
- Recruitment and retention practices. Why and how people were joining and remaining involved, and why and how the groups were succeeding over time.
- The role of community, local place and socio-spatial (and temporal) relations in and between groups, and the role of social and collaborative networks in supporting (and being affected by) groups.

I explored the centrality of behaviour change in the existing literature and alternative arguments for a practice-focused approach. The groups described their efforts as that of behaviour change, though they were engaged in changing practices. My focus, therefore, was to examine the practices performed to effect such change and how performances helped or hindered the neighbouring groups.

Reviewing the literatures concerning specific groups provided insights for fieldwork and analysis. Highlights include motivations, benefits, problems, success factors, place-specificities, networking, and regulatory support. The role of capacity underpinned groups' success. Examination of Transition highlighted the organisational, control, support, and networking effects of the movement. Food literature stressed the importance of culture and differences in embodied material practice across groups, which I associate with recruitment and retention practices. Gardening literature highlighted differences in perceptions of what action in specific places creates. The variations in place-space and temporal specificities and patterns were also identified for further examination. Foraging drew attention to competing use of space and the role of reputation, sharing food and building social networks. These were all areas for further analysis, in a more detailed, comparative way across the neighbouring groups.

The review also established significant omissions, which I aim to address within chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, such as consideration of the temporal differences between groups, in the timing and development of activities, and rhythms in practices of mobilisation. I found little discussion of socio-spatial aspects beyond the concerns of siting, the discourse of community, and the existence and role of networks. I examine these and extend attention to the mobility of members, knowledge sharing across groups, and spaces of contention, networks, and collaborations operating at different scales.

Given my aim of stepping back from existing literatures and by posing broad research questions, groups' efforts to change practices became the starting point for building the theoretical approach. The approach responds to calls for examining social movements through social practices (Crossley 2002, Seyfang et al. 2010a). I examine the utility of the application of practice theory to a field of complex, connected constellations of practices (Schatzki 2011) and, aided by the methodological approach, explore the analytical scale of focus on practices/bundles/constellations for the most useful interpretations of my research questions.

I use the practice framework of Shove et al. (2012), and particular aspects of practice theories proved useful in explaining findings and my interpretations thereof. These include the interplay between elements of practice, and how practices develop and disappear over time. Social movement theories offer a focus on contextual framing, cultural and identity politics of new social movements, and a way of exploring spaces of contention, within and across the groups. In turn, practice theory contributes a greater understanding of how these are constructed, how they develop, and how they are performed within these groups.

Existing connections between the literatures highlighted the call for a focus on practice within social movement analysis, albeit from a theoretical standpoint, rather than providing any elaboration from the field. The Grassroots Innovations literature calls for social practice contribution to explore the doing of innovation and suggests social movement literature can contribute to understanding resource mobilisation, culture and identity politics, and macro-contextual landscape pressures. I take up these calls for examining the interplay between the literatures.

By comparing neighbouring groups, I provide a unique contribution to the growing body of work on grassroots sustainability groups. Capitalising on my access, I focussed on a single London borough, which was experiencing the growth of community renewable energy, Transition groups, and other groups. I decided to explore these research interests through a longer-term ethnographic study across the groups, a method lacking in use in previous studies. This approach enabled me to participate in, observe, and discuss the practices of mobilisation with members, networks, and collaborators. The focus on a single urban area and neighbouring groups enabled a comparison of how practices were articulated, and how they helped and hindered mobilisation in the different groups. Applying the practice approach to research — ethnography-as-practice — contributes further to understanding practices in a growing number of fields. In the next chapter, I explain the ethnography-as-practice approach in greater detail, how materials were generated, the fieldwork methods undertaken, and the analytical strategy employed.

## Chapter 3 Researching mobilisation

I now turn attention to researching mobilisation. As explained in Chapter 2, my approach to understanding grassroots sustainability group mobilisation was a social constructionist perspective, using a social practice framework with contributions from social movements. I briefly described how I applied the same practice lens to developing this research; ethnography-as-practice. I highlighted that my mobilisation, research training, aims, questions and design, initial areas of interest and ongoing analysis were messily co-constitutive. I began this thesis in 2010, building on my mobilisation and earlier research experiences. Analysis and writing was interrupted, extending to 2018, which gave insight into the temporal developments and longevity of the groups.

The messiness of both mobilisation and research is particularly salient here, as ethnography-as-practice attends to details of practices, co-practitioners, performances, and materialities of research endeavours. It also brings attention to the material output (this document) that the reader, as a situated interpretive audience (Pryke 2003), reads. Inevitably this thesis is a partial perspective (Massey 2003); there is a degree of sanitisation of the research development and interpretations, and the format gives the impression of a linear process, which does not fully reflect research in practice (Crang 2003). Therefore, throughout I include reflections, interconnections, and influences on thinking during the research practice.

First, in 3.1, I explain the research approach. I detail the rationale for using an ethnographic approach. I consider ethnography-as-practice alongside the framework from Pryke et al. (2003), attending to ethical concerns, how the co-practitioners were considered (including my own biography and skills), and how this influenced the design. I explain how the field was conceptualised. This sets the scene for the research endeavour by providing insight into the aims, materials, and resources of my research practice.

Second, in 3.2, I outline the research design, which was the idealised research plan. I explain the mixed qualitative methods selected and materials to be generated, in relation to the research questions and the analytical strategy. This section is included as it was a distanced, idealised, and imagined version of the research process. It exists as distinct unit in varying material and discursive forms, each with different real and imagined

situated audiences.

Third, in 3.3, I describe how research-as-practice was performed with its messy realities. I explain how the field site was delineated, the materials were generated, and analysis and writing up developed. I introduce the field site, Haringey, and the groups included in the ethnography. I reflect on research practice, challenges and limitations, and the contribution of ethnography to understanding grassroots sustainability groups. I highlight how ethnography-as-practice drew useful analytical parallels with mobilisation-as-practice and consider the utility of using the practice approach in research development.

### **3.1 Developing the research approach**

Here I turn attention to the research approach and the rationale for ethnography. Using the practice framework, I examine the ethnography-as-practice and explain how it was useful in thinking through the research process from design through to final material outputs. Within this, attention is given to constituent research practices, their elements and the relationships between them, the co-practitioners of research and the contexts of research performance. This draws attention to the concerns of methods such as positionality, reflexivity, and ethics.

### **Establishing the rationale for ethnography**

Here I explain why ethnography was the most appropriate approach. Ethnography is characterised as being founded upon participant observation over an extended time period and ‘is a uniquely useful method for uncovering the processes and meanings that undergird sociospatial life’ (Herbert 2000:550). Crang and Cook (2007) explain ethnography is often used alongside other qualitative methods, such as focus groups and interviews (as relied upon for my MSc fieldwork). Using an ethnographic approach on this thesis provided the opportunity to spend more time with the groups and use complementary qualitative methods to delve into the multiple versions of ‘inter-subjective truths’ of their mobilisation (ibid.:14).

Whatmore (2003) explains how ethnography is distinctive: ‘paying as close attention to social practices (what people do) as to social discourses (what people say)’. It involves immersion in the groups’ and participants’ everyday routines and comes ‘closest to the notion of “generating materials”, as opposed to “collecting data”, of any method in the social sciences’ (ibid.:93). ‘Generating materials’ highlights that data is produced, rather than found, and that the researcher is not implicated alone in its co-construction (ibid.). This resonates with the practice approach, drawing attention to the multiple co-practitioners and performances of research. Whilst my previous interviews relied on spoken stories of participants, an ethnographic approach allowed concurrent focus on the stories of groups-as-entities, practices, co-practitioners, and the spaces of contention.

As explained in 2.3, I was interested in the emotional, sensorial, bodily effects, and consequences of practices. As highlighted by Watson and Till (2010), observation ‘entails description of and reflection upon embodied and emotional experiences, intersubjective and material exchanges, and social and non-human interactions’ (2010:126) and ‘only by participating with others can ethnographers better understand lived, sensed, experienced, and emotional worlds (Crang and Cook 2007; Herbert 2000)’ (2010:129).

Ethnography also offered the opportunity to explore socio-spatial and temporal patterns. From my mobilisation experiences, I was alerted to the effects of project spaces, place frames, social networks, and the borough-wide network. Watson and Till (2010) explain the contributions of geography to ethnography, by helping us understand ‘how people create and experience their worlds through processes such as place making, inhabiting social spaces, forging local and transnational networks, and representing and decolonizing spatial imaginaries’ (2010:122). As yet, there had been no comparison across multiple types of groups, and by embarking on ethnography across related groups, in close geographical proximity, I would be able to explore the connections and movements between them.

I was aware of the ethnographic heritage of the first wave of practice theorists, such as Goffman and Bourdieu. I reviewed Hargreaves’ ethnography of a sustainability program in the workplace (2008) and Hatton’s ethnography of a low-impact intentional community (2007), both PhD theses. Aside from these, I noted a lack of ethnographic approaches to groups, or (later formulation) social practice-informed or sustainability-

related investigations. Often methods are used which require shorter timelines, perhaps in part due to issues raised by Pryke et al. (2003): funding requirements and time pressures. I, however, had the luxury of time and access through prior research and my local participation to multiple local groups.

Ethnography, therefore, provided the perfect approach for exploring practices and the groups' geographies. Mixed qualitative methods combine perspectives. Interviews provide reported accounts and, whilst practitioners can talk about practices (Hitchings 2012), they may not reveal the deeply embedded nature of practices or their tacit knowledges. Therefore, participation and observation offered complementary opportunities and enabled me to explore my mobilisation experiences in relation to others. In particular, it brought attention to my bodily movements, objects, senses and emotions, which in turn helped observe other participants. Observation allowed me to attend to the range of practices involved, those designed to mobilise and those more mundane, to become attuned to the small, perhaps seemingly insignificant details of bodily movements, dispositions of individuals, how they relate in groups, the discursive framings, self, and group presentation. Observations attended to the socio-spatial relations and the wider geographies of groups and their extended influence. Time afforded the opportunity to see how practices relate, travel between groups, and are performed similarly, differently, to greater or less benefit (in mobilising), in different groups, their networks, collaborations, and beyond. The multiple visits and encounters with the groups allowed me to build these observations and interpretations over time. There were practical considerations too. These are highlighted in the next section, which discusses how I considered ethnography-as-practice and how it aided the research development.

## **Exploring ethnography through the practice lens**

Having established the rationale for ethnography, I now explain how considering ethnography-as-practice aided the research process. Given the earlier observation that the most recent wave of practice theory had been limited in its application to empirical explorations, I was curious as to how a practice approach might be fruitfully applied to thinking through ethnography-as-practice. In particular, how a practice approach would help understand a complex practice-bundle (Schatzki 2011), examined theoretically though rarely empirically (Hargreaves 2008). I used the practice framework explained

in the previous chapter,<sup>11</sup> and I turned to the work of Pryke et al. (2003) — ‘Using Social Theory: Thinking through research’. Their work helped me apply social theory to methods. They also explore issues that resonated when considering ethnography through a practice lens. They drew my attention to the messiness of doing research, whilst providing a framework for thinking through the approach, design, and performance of fieldwork, analysis, and writing up.

I considered ethnography as a triumvirate of practices, co-practitioners and performances, from question development through methods design, implementation, analysis, reflection, and writing up. The practice lens drew attention to the aims, procedures, skills, and materials of ethnography. These are both requirements of its performance, and are produced by it (Shove et al. 2012). Co-practitioners included those in the field: myself, gatekeepers, interviewees, groups, the council, networks, and other stakeholders. They also included more distanced co-practitioners such as those supervisors, department colleagues — who, alongside the traditions of social science research and expectations of doing a PhD, influence the performances of ethnography (Pryke et al. 2003). Thinking through how methods would be performed drew attention to how, where and when fieldwork would be conducted, and how performances may change and affect the co-practitioners involved. I also considered how approaching ethnography-as-practice might bring insights to internal research practices in groups. Ethnography and groups' self-evaluations can be explored as integrative practice-bundles that may also share dispersed practices (Schatzki 2011). Thus considering them together during fieldwork might produce useful materials.

### **Thinking through the field**

Massey (2003) implores us to consider the field critically. Explaining the historic debates about the relation to the field and fieldwork, she highlights, citing Outram (1996:259), the ‘complex union of spatial metaphor and epistemological assumptions’ (Massey 2003:72). Thus she recommends thinking about what one’s field is, what we imagine about it, our relationship to it, and the kind of engagement we aim to have.

The practice framework helped me conceive of the mobilisation of groups as a complex bundle of integrative practices, with distributed constituent practices appearing in other practice bundles. Practices travel, through different and shared practitioners, through

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<sup>11</sup> Elements of practice: meanings, competences and materials, and constitutive practices, co-practitioners (and bodily, routinised, sensory and emotional aspects) involved and performances over time.



individuals and groups and beyond. My aim with ethnographic practice was to explore this complexity, attending to both the overtly mobilising practices and the mundane ones that sustain involvement. It is a question of focus and scale; drilling down into individual practices, elements, performances, and practitioners, up to groups (groups themselves, and practice-bundles). My aim was to observe patterns, similarities and differences, and make interpretations as to the practices and relationships that are crucial in mobilisation. Whilst performances are situated, I hoped to find insights that are useful, either as they are relatable or because they provide distinction to other mobilisation settings.

Within this ethnography, the primary means of 'generating materials' was participation, observation, and interviews (Whatmore 2003). For participant observation, I brought ethnographic practices to these sites of mobilisation. I considered how this might disturb mobilisation practices, as my body would be performing (some) different routines (sayings and doings) and I would bring know-how, which is (possibly) different to the others involved. Thus I would have an effect on the groups' activities, and divert attention toward research practices, whilst at the same time trying to participate in such a way that materials are generated that would allow me to develop useful interpretations. Thus the research practice is co-constructed by me, the other practitioners, and the locations, times, and other activities that are occurring. In the search for ethically generated and enlightening materials (Whatmore 2003), I endeavoured to experience the practices of mobilisation through participation in the events, volunteer days, the workshops, or sitting with the audience and asking questions of speakers. I was aware that my skills and knowledge vary (in relation to energy and food) and therefore I may also divert skills and resources to my performances of those tasks, and to the questions I was asking. I also thought about practices of observation, and considered if the very act of not joining in, but rather watching, listening and making notes, may be more distracting.

Interviews provide opportunities to talk, a universal, dispersed practice, and yet the nature of talk in the interview (as a more complex integrative practice) is very specific (Schatzki 1996). It is potentially uncomfortable, for the interviewee (and for me) and, therefore, I thought about the locations and the use of specific *ways* of engaging in practice, to make these interview engagements more comfortable and productive. For other kinds of talk, such as at the groups' activities, I considered how the encounters could be managed to be respectful of their motivations for being in attendance, and be

enlightening for me.

My relationship to the field was established, in that I was an active part of a local group. I planned to engage with new groups and expand my network connections, moving through the field physically, as a carrier of practice, and with developing skills, knowledges, and bodily routines. Given previously-heard complaints regarding research abstraction, my considerations turned to considering my co-practitioners and our research engagements to avoid such objections. Thus considerations of positionality and power relations between co-practitioners (England 1994), and the benefits of reflexivity throughout the research process, though, as argued by Rose, self-reflexivity is inevitably limited (Rose 1997), led to specific considerations for research design, outlined below.

### **Co-created knowledges, positionality and power relations**

As Massey explains 'all spaces are constituted in and through power relations and it is this co-constitution which must be addressed' (2003:87) and that through defining the field, I, the researcher, have initiated a power imbalance that is not removable. Research engagements have the potential to be characterised by a divergent set of research-related skills and know-how between the researcher and interviewee. There are also potential power imbalances, with the researcher leading the performance, and the interviewee's responses crucial for generating useful materials. Considering their comfort in involvement was paramount and I planned to regularly review how best to manage the interactions.

One means of managing some of these issues was the use of ethical guidelines. Whilst Thrift (2003) critiques the 'audit culture' of research, I found such practices useful, both as a new-research practitioner following an established research practice, and due to the expectations of grassroots sustainability groups, who had previous experience of researchers visiting them. I adhered to the Open University's ethical guidelines: including the use of informed consent, anonymity during analysis and confidentiality within written results, techniques commonly used in social science and advocated within methods texts (see, for example, Ali and Kelly 2004). I developed the participant information sheet and the consent form for ethical approval<sup>12</sup> from the Open University and for use in interviews (see Appendix 1). The formality of the written information, requirement of a signature, and the opportunity for participants to contact the University

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<sup>12</sup> Open University's Human Research Ethics Committee approval reference HREC/11/#954/1 received 30.06.11.

provided a means of protection and expectation-management for both co-practitioners, and for handing the interviewee control of their participation. The approval process helped construct my formal status as a researcher to participants I knew, and ensured my confidence in undertaking the fieldwork. The project was deemed realistic, was to follow well-established research procedures and I would not put myself in situations which could be unethical or dangerous. It provided me with something official to present to the groups to aid in securing their participation.

Practice theory and the consideration of generating materials also invites similar attention to the material (Pryke et al. 2003). Whilst the information sheet and consent forms are concerned with the practice of interviews, in particular the protection of the interviewee, I gave thought to the material too. This manifested itself as a concern for the progress of the groups and their efforts to improve the environment, reduce carbon dioxide emissions, and build community resilience (in different ways). In practice, this meant consideration of how I would travel to research engagements and which ethically-sourced food contributions to take. These research practices were merged in with my increasing environmental concerns, changes in the home, and mobilisation by and into the activities of the groups.

### **My biographical know-how**

The practice framework considers individuals as carriers of practice. I felt it important to consider my biography, as it affected my mobilisation, research interests, skills, know-how, and therefore practice performance. I have already talked about my relationship to the groups and field site. I carried some experience of research practice from the MSc, and part of my doctoral research training included developing skills through research training and conferences.

I brought significant professional experience in communications to this ethnography. These professional interests, understanding of communications practices whilst in other fields (media strategy and creative development), attuned me to their importance when being mobilised. I planned to use my experience in exploring communications practices within the grassroots sustainability groups. I struggled to find much academic literature on the use of professional experience within the research process. Paterson and Zoellner (2010) discuss the efficacy of professional experience in the ethnographic investigation

of media production,<sup>13</sup> explaining that access to settings requires professional connections and creates concerns around the ability to conduct pure observation due to the potential loss of objectivity. My aim was different; rather than taking ethnography to my professional site, I was doing the reverse. There are similarities however — through access and thus via shared knowledge schemes and skills, to aid understanding particular communicative practices within this new site, the grassroots sustainability groups. I dispute their point about objectivity, given the epistemological approach of this research, however I understand their point about influence. In this project, I believe my professional insight to be beneficial in turning attention to a set of practices infrequently investigated and therefore disrupting the usual patterns of investigation (Massey 2003), and I was aware that I would need to make interpretations based on the different field and its specificities rather than in relation to my professional field.

Ethnography, over other methods, ‘presents opportunities to reimagine the practice of research more generally and offers scholars the possibility of contributing to the world at large’ (Watson and Till 2010:134). They explain it is more about ‘its “doing” than it is about the procurement of “facts”’ (ibid.). It is through considering the details of practices, in the design of the project, and throughout research performances, therefore, that this project fulfils its aims of contributing to the understanding the mobilisation of grassroots sustainability groups.

## **3.2 Designing the research**

Having explained the ethnography through the practice lens, here I briefly describe the details of the research design: the methods selected to generate materials and the planned analytical approach. This design, which developed over time, lived as a discrete entity, appearing in the upgrade, presentations on my work prior to fieldwork, and in descriptions to those involved in generating materials. It was the idealised plan, which all appeared achievable, and with imagined co-practitioners involved. I include this design as it explains the aims and intended outcomes, and provides the foil for the next section, performing research-as-practice, for reflection on how successfully the research questions were addressed, and on the performance of methods.

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<sup>13</sup> This is different though related media industry to my previous career.

# The plan for generating research materials

Here I explain the planned qualitative methods, selected within the ethnography and the materials to be generated in order to explore the question: **How are Grassroots Sustainability Groups mobilising?** I selected these methods with experimentation in mind, aware that I had the benefit of time and access, and that connecting with new groups, securing participation and research performances, may necessitate amendments as fieldwork progressed. Within each question I summarise the main aspects I planned to explore.

## 1 How and why are people participating?

This focuses on the individuals. The primary means of understanding motivations, impacts, and how participants perceive group practices were conversations with group participants. Interviews were chosen, to encourage participants to reflect on motivations and impacts from participation. Following Hitchings' (2012) finding that people can talk revealingly about social practices, questions were designed to encourage reflection on how involvement affected their practices within and outside the group, and on how group practices were performed to encourage their mobilisation. The semi-structured format enabled interviewees to describe opinions and experiences freely in an informal atmosphere (Kitchen and Tate 2000) whilst maintaining some consistency across interviews for analysis.

Learning from research experience during the MSc, I offered a range of locations to potential interviewees to increase their comfort and involvement. They included the groups' project spaces (if permanent), local cafes, near workplaces, and within homes. I was curious about the effects of location, and temporal or spatial distance to the groups, on interviews, bodily reactions, and perceptions of those involved.

Whatmore, in her discussion of generating more 'reliable' materials, recommended experimenting with conversational methods in order to 'amplify the frictions, discrepancies and silences in the talk generated between researcher and researched' (2003:99). I decided to follow interviews up with informal discussions, and to expand on interesting findings. Informal discussions with interviewees and other attendees at group events included questions about participation that day, the immediate experiences – and impacts – of practices, and participation in group discussions during group activities. These active discussions, and those observed passively, were included to

allow me to examine shared knowledge schemes. Whilst practice theory focuses on the collective understandings associated with the practice, given Hitchings' (2012) findings, I wanted to listen to what was said about knowledge and practice, its role in motivations and impacts, as well as how knowledges were more actively co-created and shared. It was important to explore (through all the methods) the various understandings of being an activist, how it changes over time, and how it is constituted through practices.

## 2 What are the groups' practices of mobilisation?

This focuses on the group. The primary means of generating materials to identify and examine practices of mobilisation was through spending time with the groups. I planned a combination of participation and observation at a variety of group activities over an extended time frame, mindful of the messy nature of being in the field and therefore the need to be responsive to opportunities to do both. I wanted to explore the practices identified by participants and those unmentioned, those that are intended to mobilise and those more mundane and invisible, those that help and those that hinder mobilisation.

I wanted to identify and attend to all co-practitioners (individuals, myself, and groups) to examine their role as carriers of practice and how they are affected by, and constituted by, mobilisation practices (and in the context of other practice bundles). I was interested in routinised bodily performances (doings and sayings) and tacit embedded knowledge; and also how this is learnt when new practitioners join the groups and groups turn to new projects. I wanted to explore the social movement discussion of group culture and belonging and how bodies (either the individual or group) signify their activism and create belonging beyond the face-to-face interactions. I was also interested in material aspects — both their presence and absence in resource-poor groups — and how they facilitate and limit practices.

## 3 How do grassroots sustainability groups mobilise beyond the group?

This focuses on the relationship between groups and wider networks. The primary means of generating materials to understand the effects and connections of groups beyond their own activities was observation and participation in external activities. Participation and observation would be continued, with attention to interactions with neighbouring groups, networks, and other external publics. The practices observed were to be discussed with the core group members, and observations gathered during internal meetings considering externally-focused practices, to understand how they were

understood and performed differently across the groups.

Background research would generate additional materials by establishing the details of the collaborative partnership projects; those involved, their aims, and the contexts in which they are operating. This was to aid my understanding of the performers, links between them and role of different organisations in local, national, and international networks. The advertising and promotion of activities were to be collected for analysis of communications. I planned follow-up questions of core group members about the development of these materials, and informal discussions at group activities, in order to identify how people find out about the events.

## **Setting out an analytical approach**

Having explained how I planned how to generate materials, here I describe the analytical approach. Ethnographic analysis (as an integrative practice constituted by dispersed analytical processes, Schatzki 1996) was ongoing within research development, methods design, methods in practice, and the more formal analysis and writing up phase.

From previous research experiences, I knew fieldwork with the groups required flexibility; dependent on, for example, gatekeepers, access, and successfully securing interviews. Interpretation during data collection and analysis would pinpoint key ideas and themes, comparing interviewee perspectives to my own. Whilst the analysis of grassroots sustainability groups' development and my past experience of mobilisation suggested certain kinds of practices to explore in detail; identifying the precise focus of practices and practice-bundles was part of the research task. Ongoing analysis would be crucial to identify the scale to focus upon, by drawing in and out on bundles and their constitutive practices.

The ethnography was planned as a series of co-performed research performances within multiple group spaces, physical and virtual, and through networks and collaborations. I knew there were to be key milestones along this journey to be considered. First, finalising which groups were to be included through successful access and subsequently conducting a sufficient number of interviews. Second, and relatedly, deciding when enough material was generated to be able to produce confident interpretations. I planned

to evaluate progress on a weekly basis.

Several sources and methods were included in design to produce a more detailed, rich and contextualised account (see, for example, Valentine 2001) and thus all materials generated were to be analysed hand-in-hand. I expected to generate a mass of research materials; interview audio, field notebooks full of descriptions, informal conversations, as well as ongoing reflections on fieldwork and ideas to explore further. Desk research would consider communications, background documents, reports and meeting minutes from the groups, council, networks, and collaborators.

One area of concern was that awareness of senses would be challenging. To overcome the dominance of audio-visual and easily-overlooked everyday senses, it is recommended that attention be paid to the aromas around people, the role of the body (researcher and participants), touch, motion, and activity (Valtonen et al. 2010). As it is difficult to focus on all these simultaneously, the researcher should address each individually initially, and how they inter-relate subsequently (ibid.). I felt this would require practice.

As Pryke (2003) and Crang (2003) highlight, there is a more traditional 'analysis' phase, alongside writing up, once the researcher has exited the field, where research efforts would be turned to handling the volume of materials. The interviews were to be anonymised and transcribed to allow detailed engagement with the materials, with attention paid to both what was *said* and *how it was communicated* through consultation of field-notes (see, for example, Bryne 2004). Field notes and background documents were to be annotated and attention would be given to the informal discussions with particular attention to practices, sayings and doings, knowledges, emotions, senses and body language, materials, and the contextual details of locations. I planned to use interpretive analytical techniques and Nvivo to help code, group themes, and reiteratively explore the materials to unearth further linkages and omissions, as well as be reminded of significant non-verbal responses. Themes and codes are both indigenous (emic) and researcher-generated (etic), with explanations being sought for unexpected and contrary opinions (Crang 2005). In line with the practice approach, I would be reflexive when expressing my interpretations.

The role of co-practitioners in analysis was considered throughout. I decided that unless explicitly requested by a participant, they would not be actively involved in final



analysis. As Crang (2003) highlights, the research questions direct the analytical direction, amongst a myriad of possible approaches. As my approach was an observation on the mobilisation of groups rather than an assessment of their efficacy, and an ethnographic approach rather than a participant-directed one, I concluded that asking for feedback on materials such as transcripts would be inappropriate. I also shared the view of England (1994), who is sceptical about involving participants in the post material collection process and who claims that the selection of which voices to include is my responsibility, decided upon during analysis and synthesis.

### **3.3 Performing research-as-practice**

After deciding on a research approach and formulating the research plan, the reality of research practice was far more complex and required ongoing planning and improvising during research performance. Here I discuss how the field site unfolded, how materials were generated, the progression of analysis, and writing up. I consider ethnography-as-practice and how, in performing selected methods and working in the field, the idealised research design shifted. Imagined co-practitioners became individual personalities, there were challenges and opportunities, thus ethical considerations were necessarily ongoing. I detail the elements of the research design that required amendments through my fieldwork journey. Analysis occurred throughout (of materials and methods), and I found there was a natural longitudinal shift in focus, from developing the field and generating materials, to the formal analysis phase and writing up during year three, 2012-2013, and beyond to my extended analysis phase up to 2018. Whilst there were several concurrent elements within the fieldwork and analysis, the phases are separated for the purposes of discussion.

### **Delineating the field site**

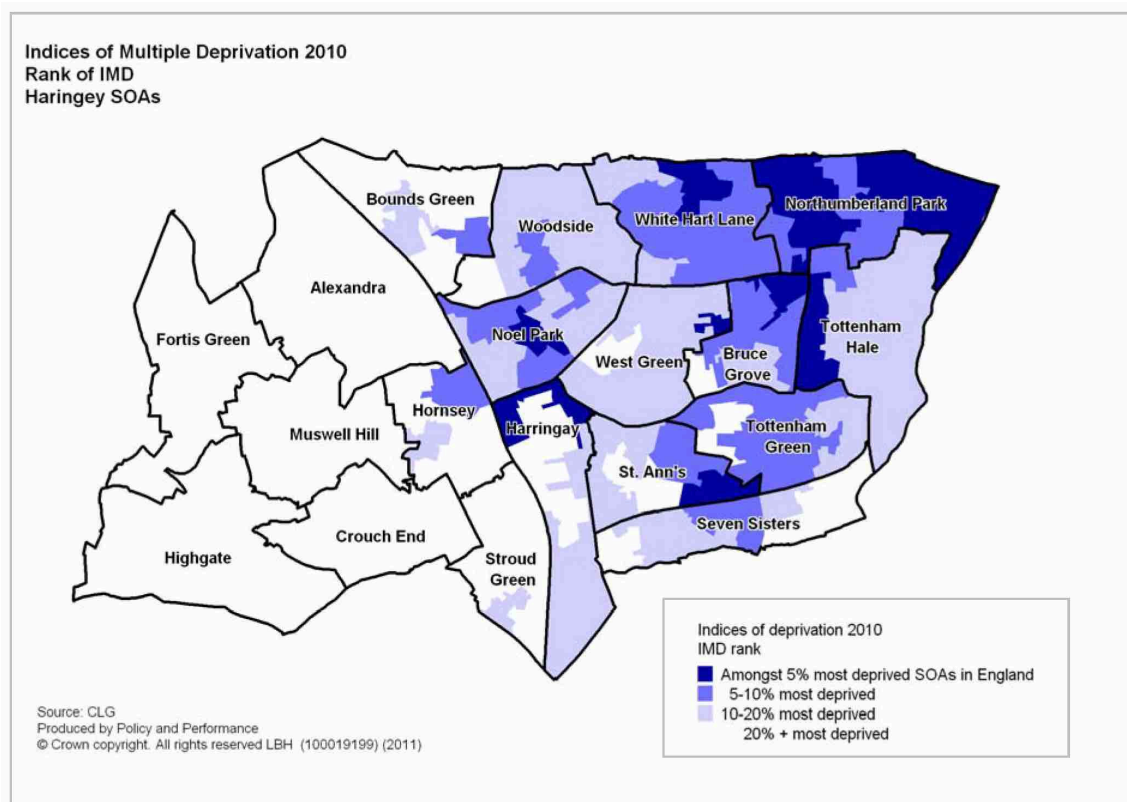
Here I explain how the field site evolved. Related to the earlier discussions of how I conceptualised the field (Massey 2003), this discussion focuses on the geographical extent and longitudinal development. I describe the research performances, co-practitioners, and constituent practices such as introductions, securing interviews, attendance of group activities, which were more co-constitutive and temporally jumbled than described for reader clarity. The London borough of Haringey was the entry point

due to my membership, access, the Borough Network, and borough wide sustainability-related activities of the council. This provided a unique contribution to the existing literature, with the resultant spatial extent of the field site resembling a layering; with local groups, their network, their interactions with the council, other networks, and beyond.

### Entering the field: Haringey

Haringey is located in the north of London, bordering Barnet, Camden, Islington, Hackney, Waltham Forest and Enfield. The population is 267,540 (Office for National Statistics 2014) and is the fifth most ethnically diverse in the country (Haringey 2010). Haringey itself had an important discursive role. In the discourse of grassroots sustainability groups, Haringey featured in two connected ways, which contribute to understanding local sustainability-related action.

The first is the divide between east and west. Haringey is among the most deprived boroughs in the country with 'a distinct polarisation, in terms of social grade, between the east and the west of the borough'. As shown in Figure 2, there are high concentrations of grades D and E in the east and AB, C1 in the west (Haringey Council 2011 Census).



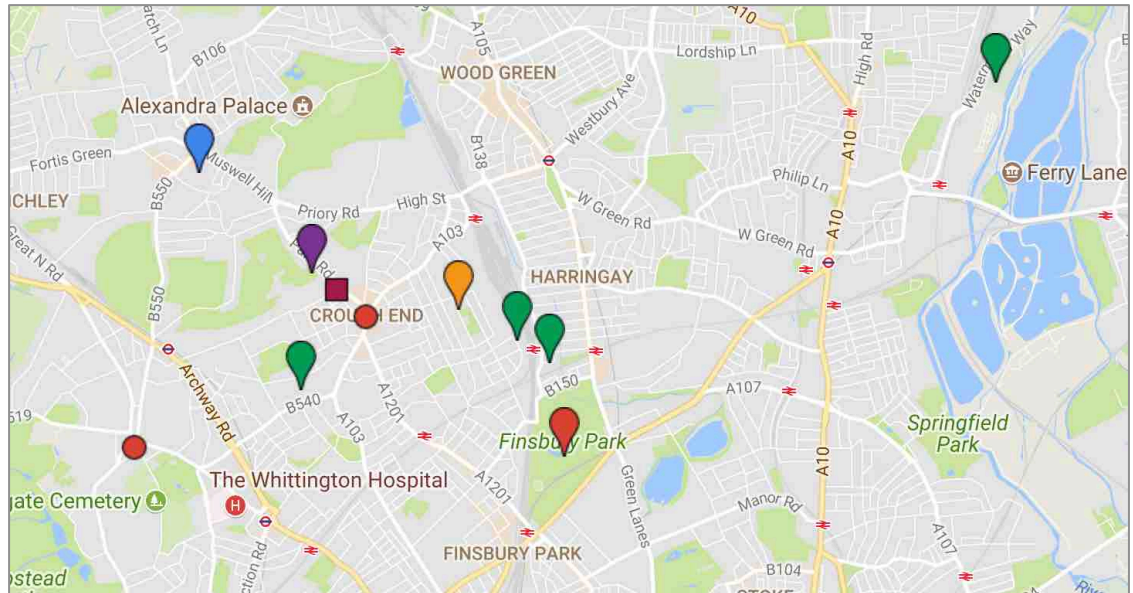
**Figure 2: Map of the 19 wards within the borough of Haringey, and the significant differences in deprivation between the east and the west. (Haringey 2010)**

Members of the grassroots sustainability groups, the Borough Network, and the councils' Green Team all mentioned this east-west split. It was used to explain and amplify the achievements of the groups across the borough, the strength of the network, and the efforts of the council to engage with the whole borough on green issues. This success was 'despite' the significant demographic differences.

The second related discussion in the groups was that of a (sometimes slightly grudging) positive recognition of the actions of the council and its Green Team. This discussion identified them as a vital co-practitioner in mobilisation practices in the borough, and they highlighted that Haringey Council was far more active in sustainability issues in comparison to other boroughs in North London. I was already aware of their role in the Muswell Hill Low Carbon Zone (LCZ). Their other responsibilities were mainly borough-wide, including environmental resources, carbon management and sustainability, and the Haringey 40:20 programme, which launched in 2010 and was the council's sustainability commitment to achieving 40% reductions in borough-wide carbon dioxide emissions by 2020. The Green Team engaged with the Borough Network to contribute to the development and delivery of the 40:20 programme. This, alongside the funding opportunities and other projects carried out by the Green Team, resulted in the favourable opinion of the council's efforts and emphasised the importance of exploring their activities and role within fieldwork.

### **Meeting the groups from west to east**

I investigated the grassroots sustainability groups through the **Borough Network** and found over 50 sustainability-related groups and organisations across the borough (see Appendix 2 for the list). The longitudinal progression of research resulted in a gradual spatial shift from the west toward the east of the borough. The involvement of new groups stopped once I had fulfilled the aim of including groups involved in different aspects of sustainability, and when I had a broad sense that sufficient interesting materials were being generated. I was concerned the groups were not as widely distributed across the borough as I had imagined in research design. However, the field site development via meeting neighbouring groups provided analytical insight into how the groups and members were connected geographically and via social networks. The map (Figure 3) shows the location of all groups visited during fieldwork, both within and outside the borough. The Foraging group's locations depended on season and four illustrative locations have been included.



Key:

- Energy group
- Nurture group
- Transition & Urban Food group
- Foraging location
- Foraging location
- Foraging indoor event
- Foraging indoor event
- Borough Network Gathering
- Green on the Screen
- Neighbouring Transition group
- Neighbouring Transition group

**Figure 3: Map of the grassroots sustainability groups visited during<sup>14</sup> fieldwork.**

A key research aim was to compare nearby groups and include a variety of activities: related to energy, food, or Transition. In practice, I found which grassroots sustainability groups were included was determined through the social networks between the groups, my network connections, and pragmatism related to access and resources.

Within each group I spent time with, there were multiple interpersonal connections to other groups, typically through friendships or proximity to shared geographies such as home, work or other community action. Groups also positively mentioned their neighbouring groups. This was not just a physical spatial relationship; neighbourliness

<sup>14</sup> Harringay, on the map, is a ward within Haringey the borough.

also featured in the spatial imaginaries and discourse of the groups and their members. This is akin to the imagination of the field as discussed by Massey (2003), explored within research design, though in this context it was the imagined field of those mobilised by the groups. Examples included positive aspects of neighbourliness — such as sharing resources and proximity — including shared cultures, values, concerns, and members. These neighbourly relations inspired aspects to explore, such as the shared (or competing) resources available to groups, and the shared (or differing) visions of solutions to sustainability problems. More macro aspects included how groups were differently affected by the policy context (discussed in 1.2) and their differing connections to networks beyond the borough.

I started with my group, the **Energy group**, involved in carbon dioxide emissions reductions, renewable energy, and campaigning. I was known as a researcher-member due to my prior research, and was a familiar face to the core group and other members. Securing their support was straightforward and my participation encouraged further members to become involved.

Lucy, involved in the Energy group and the LCZ collaboration, was also a core group member of a group further east. The **Nurture group** was located in disused green space, with volunteers turning it into an orchard, food growing space, and constructing a community building. Lucy became a gatekeeper in research practice, introducing me to the Nurture group and members of further groups, and contributed an interview and ongoing discussions about the project.

Through discussions about and with other Transition groups I met Emma of the **Transition group** - again further east, attending events, core group meetings, and securing interviews. My increasing knowledge of Transition, involvement in the growing national Transition research network, and attendance of Transition events in London (invited to by Emma) aided discussions with members through shared interests and, occasionally, co-attendance of events.

I was introduced to the **Urban Food group**, by both Emma of Transition group, as a constituent project within the Transition group, and also those involved in the Nurture group. The Urban Food group was similar to the Nurture group in food growing activities but with additional activities of formal training sessions and providing seedlings to other growing groups.

The **Foraging group** was recommended as a unique group by social connections with a crossover of interests, and members of the Urban Food group in particular. Becoming involved was directed by their monthly seasonal activities and locations, as they did not have a single project space. I attended several sessions, and was introduced to one of the core members at an experiential foraged food tasting at the Borough Network gathering.

As I met each group, I also signed up to their mediated communications. Group members rarely discussed communications without prompting, however I was confident, from my mobilisation and professional experience that such practices were important. Thus the participant observation and background research was crucial to explore further. I found all grassroots sustainability groups were performing communications practices, extending the field site into physical environments beyond the groups' face-to-face activities, and to virtual environments. This included advertising through posters and social media, internal communication through email groups and via the Borough Network. The practices and performances, communication messages, and their materiality varied for each group (discussed in following chapters). Groups increasingly made use of social media channels through the fieldwork year and beyond.

Whilst generating materials, it was useful to begin analysing the similarities and differences between the groups. Table 1 summarises them and identifies the spectrum of activities the groups are involved in and compares the governance, participation types and spaces of activity.

**Table 1: Summary of the groups and their activities.**

Name in Thesis	Energy	Nature	Transition	Urban Food	Foraging	Borough Network
Governance	Elected core group	Volunteer core group	Volunteer core group	Volunteer core group	Volunteer core group	Volunteer core group
Main type of participation	Paid membership	Weekly work days	Project specific volunteers	Weekly work days	Online network, monthly events	Local groups represented in network
Types of space used	Multi location	Fixed project space	Multi location	Fixed project space	Public space, gardens	Mainly online, events in community spaces
<b>Activities:</b>						
External community building						
Internal community building						
Health, well-being						
Renewable energy						
Energy saving						
Reducing waste						
Transport						
Water						
Habitat, Bees						
Growing food						
Changing food habits						
Grafting						
Foraging food						

As Table 1 summarises, each group had a primary focus area such as food or energy, but they were all engaged in a range of practice/behaviour change endeavours, both of individuals and at the group level. From observing the groups interacting together at the Borough Network events, I concluded these differences in specific activities helped differentiate and define the territory of each group, in turn encouraging (and potentially facilitated by) inter-group collaborations, as well as their overall network co-membership.

### Limiting the extent of the field site

Field trips were suggested during interviews and discussions at groups, to me, and others, who expressed an interest in learning new skills. They offered opportunities to understand how participants managed multi-memberships, what different groups meant to them, and how their networks spread.

Ann introduced me to a group in Tottenham growing food in community gardens; producing an enlightening conversation with the leaders, who asked ‘Do you like us enough to come back?’ (Joe). Anita took me further east to a group growing food commercially, through veg boxes, on the border of Haringey and Hackney. These encounters generated useful materials, and were fun, but eventually I stopped meeting new groups. Whilst I was uncertain my current groups would generate sufficient materials, the new groups were involved in similar activities and I did not want to spread myself too thinly. This mirrored the challenge identified by my co-practitioners; balancing time availability and ability to commit with all the interesting local opportunities.

Relatedly were logistical concerns mentioned by many members of the groups; access to groups via public transport and the oft-mentioned complaints regarding poor connections across the borough from east to west. This was a considerable issue for Borough Network events, with efforts made to rotate locations from east to west, to be equitable to all groups. Lack of easy access frequently explained why people did not return to groups.

### **Exploring the networks and collaborations**

The **Borough Network** has been mentioned several times thus far. As shown in the comparison (Table 1), all grassroots sustainability groups were members of the Borough Network. Spending time with the core group of the network revealed the network performed similar practices to the grassroots sustainability groups. It had different intentions, networking groups rather than individuals, and the focus was supporting the groups and engaging with the council. This provided an opportunity to investigate similar and different practices, and elements of practice, through a different scale of focus.

I found Transition groups were considerably connected: through membership of the global network, through joint activities in Haringey, shared Transition training with adjoining boroughs, and London-wide events such as the Transition conference, attended by myself and several local groups. Such connections to other local Transition groups helped secure their contributions to the launch night event of my local Transition group. The Energy group was active within the Low Carbon Communities Network, a national organisation supporting groups involved in energy saving. I attended a conference alongside core group members, invited to accompany them as their adopted



researcher-member. Links to other groups and networks were encountered in digital media; through sharing news and opportunities via email. These varying levels of support and different structures are discussed further, particularly in chapter 7.

The groups confirmed that Haringey Council was the main collaborator. Their flagship programme, Haringey 40:20, asked Borough Network and individual groups to help deliver their carbon dioxide emissions-reduction promises. In another collaboration with the council, the Energy group was involved in delivering the local LCZ. This, and other local initiatives, engaged a web of stakeholders including the local Marks and Spencer, businesses, churches, and schools, each with different geographies. The grassroots sustainability groups, their different physical and virtual spatial and temporal footprints, networks, and collaborations are discussed in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7.

The performances of meeting groups, and selection of groups with different sustainability-related concerns, were beneficial for answering the research questions. However, as Massey (2003) and Law (2011) highlight, method is constructed of partial socially-constructed perspectives. The process itself used social networks, and therefore the social networks were highlighted as important. Had I used different methods, and included groups from far-flung corners of the network, less connected and not present at Borough Network events, for example, my impressions may have been very different. Whilst networks and proximity have been identified as important for mobilisation, a follow-up study that examines these practices and patterns borough-wide, would aid understanding about whether, and how, connections build, and whether groups tend toward similarities in mobilisation through their forms of intersection.

Being introduced to these networks and collaborations positively affected my fieldwork practice. My expression of interest in them and their influences on group mobilisation resulted in invitations to network events, conferences, and internal meetings with the council. This gave insight into the geographic extent of connections between grassroots sustainability groups and other groups and organisations outside the borough. It also generated materials about the practices, their beneficial role in mobilisation and the pressure on resources and time that core group practitioners suffered. The similarities and differences in the engagements of grassroots sustainability groups with networks and collaborations, the practices involved in these associations, and their effects on group mobilisation are discussed in the remainder of this thesis.

# Generating materials in practice

Here I explain how the messy practices of generating materials (Whatmore 2003) were performed. Previously I described how the field site unfolded over space and time. Here, I focus on how I met the groups and secured the interviews, the discussions with participants, the participant observation, and how I recorded the materials generated. The unfolding of the research-as-practice frequently mirrored with the journeys of mobilisation, which I discuss throughout this section. I reflect on how performances related to the original design, how they contributed to my partial perceptions of the field (Massey 2003) and understanding of mobilisation.

## **Meeting the groups and arranging interviews**

Becoming involved with grassroots sustainability groups was gradual. The practice of introductions, gaining support for participant observation and securing interviews varied by group. I felt it was messy, though reflective of the mobilisation process itself.

Face-to-face encounters were contingent on the timing of group activities. Interviews depended on how initial contact was made (in person or via email) and when I felt an interview request was appropriate. On occasion progress halted when those providing introductions or those I sought to meet were no longer available. Group members described similar patterns in how they joined the group, with initial suggestions by friends sometimes occurring far in advance of the first encounter with the group; affected by availability of time and the coordination of arrangements with friends.

I evaluated whom to approach; determined by their role, introductions, their reputation with others, and how often I saw them at events. Decisions were made in relation to the effort in securing interviews and by their perceived usefulness to generating materials. Whilst I tried to include a range of participants with differing involvement, there was self-selection by those invited: the more vocal members would volunteer. Inevitably voices were omitted (Pryke et al. 2003): those who were less vocal, who rarely attended or who were infrequently mentioned by others, and those who I found difficult to approach. This also reflected the development of social networks in the groups, the gradual gaining of reputation, different personalities, and that some people are, or chose to be, less visible.

Gaining the support of the Energy group was straightforward. Potential interviewees

were sent an email introducing me as a researcher requesting participation. I directly approached some I knew personally. Familiarity with activities meant I could initiate introductory encounters during opportune moments and talk confidently about groups' endeavours, which aided conversations. This process did not cause any of the anticipated ethical concerns due to blurring my member-researcher status.

The process was more gradual for food-related groups. I initially engaged in active participation to expand my familiarity with their activities, personalities, potential interviewees, and provide opportunities to talk about my local involvement and research. This was beneficial as potential interviewees warmed to the project. It helped manage their expectations and enabled me to be specific in my requests for encounters at events. Initially I was concerned about being less knowledgeable about urban food activism so I discussed my developing interests, finding members helpful in answering my questions and demonstrating practices. This was a pattern replicated across the grassroots sustainability groups and interactions with other new participants.

I secured the support of Haringey Council via email to my contacts from previous research, providing background information and a request for an interview with the Green Team. At the interview, the members encouraged me to attend a Haringey 40:20 meeting with the Carbon Commission,<sup>15</sup> to better understand the project. They later provided background documents for my desk research.

### **Talking to participants**

Research performances required me to be flexible, particularly when entering a face-to-face encounter. I reassessed the aims, context, and likely outputs of the immediate performance, affected by aspects such as who was attending, the imperative tasks, available resources, and factors such as the weather. Again, this pattern mirrored the experiences of group members. Practices depended on the aims of the group in that moment, and related to their long-term activities and projects, and the materials, skills, practitioners, and performance context. The process of generating materials was, therefore, messy, though to understand the materials generated, each is described separately below.

I interviewed 24 participants and the Green Team (the latter was unrecorded). There were additional unrecorded interviews, less formal in style. The details are summarised

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<sup>15</sup> This included key members of local groups involved in the collaboration.

in Appendix 3. I emailed the information sheet and consent form to interviewees prior to the interview. Before commencing, I read them out and the participants reviewed and signed them. I emphasised their anonymity and that I would handle materials carefully which might suggest their involvement. I explained the necessity of balancing the option to withdraw with analytical progression; therefore, they could remove consent up to a month post-interview. No one expressed concern nor withdrew their participation. I highlighted that a short report will be provided to participants and that the whole thesis will be available on request.

Open questions were used to ‘provide better access to interviewee’s views, interpretations of events, understandings, experiences and opinions.’ (Byrne 2004: 182). The semi-structured schedule (see Appendix 4) allowed a wealth of further topics and a degree of consistency across the discussions (Kitchen and Tate 2000). A pilot interview ensured clarity (after a few amendments) and approximate timings of an hour. Many interviews lasted longer due to passionate, and sometimes meandering, conversations. I recorded interviews for later transcription, using an unobtrusive handheld recorder, which allowed me to focus on talk, body language and other details in the field-notes.

Some locations were more effective than others. Interviews at projects were straightforward to arrange and comfortable, as noted by co-practitioners, as it was both project-related and in public space. Interviews with the Energy group were in homes and cafes due to its lack of project space. Cafes were comfortable, in terms of safety, neutrality, and access to tea and cake, though ambient noise and poor acoustics were distracting and caused problems in the clarity of the recordings.

Unexpected materials were created in interviewees’ homes, as we often discussed home or garden improvements, with the interviewee showing me around. This mini-go-along (see Kusenbach 2003) provided insight into how groups and home lives interweaved, and emphasised the messiness of interest, intention of changing practices, and influence by the group. I also had the opportunity to see how new practices, such as water saving and management of thermal comfort, were being performed.

I engaged in multiple informal discussions, summarised in Appendix 3, which were not recorded. Many occurred alongside participant observation, varying in form from single questions such as ‘why are you here today?’ to more detailed follow up conversations

with interviewees. During ongoing consideration of ethics, I decided that each form of discussion necessitated a related level of research-understanding by the co-practitioner. I assessed both when and how to provide this explanation; from very little and a brief verbal explanation, to written informed consent. Initially, I launched into detailed explanations. However, recipients were a little bemused and probably wanted to embark on their volunteering, rather than be distracted by me. Subsequently I was more restrained in my explanations.

When I knew the co-practitioner, explanation was more straightforward through reference to their knowledge of me as a researcher-member. This presentation of self and research was akin to the impression-management I had previously experienced, and detected, during participant observation as an important part of building belonging and social networks during mobilisation.

Those who engaged in informal discussions, particularly the core groups, were supportive. Many showed interest in my initial interpretations leading in one case to discussion of how communication monitoring could be immediately improved by the group. This was similar to the sharing of knowledge, co-creation of ideas, and keenness to improve that characterised internal group discussions. Several core group members became key informants, who were happy to have multiple conversations and make introductions. Such relationships were built on shared interests and enjoyment of our initial encounters and ongoing discussions and so, just as in the groups, my social network expanded and deepened over time.

The materials generated through this practice were instructive in understanding the more immediate concerns, motivations, and associations with project spaces, when attendees were asked about their participation that day. The longer conversations provided an opportunity to follow-up interviews and aspects I had experienced or identified during participant observation. It was, however, inevitably messy and incomplete, as I avoided accosting people whilst holding my fieldwork diary. Notes were hastily scribbled and recollections written up after the event. Thus a partial picture was being built from the aspects that were at the forefront of my memory.

### **Getting involved**

Participation and observation were crucial for observing and experiencing the practices of mobilisation. Early engagement with groups and the research questions helped me

think through what I wanted to participate in and observe. However, the groups varied in their activities resulting in two practical aspects to resolve; deciding which activities to attend and how to handle materials to enable cross-group comparisons.

For attendance, I signed up to the groups' communications. The Energy group widely promoted their events and most were public, though workshops required booking. I volunteered in response to an internal email asking for help with the stall, and was later invited to collaboration meetings and to help with group research. For the new groups, communications alerted me to events, volunteering days, and foraging walks that I then attended. After interviews later in the year, I was invited to core group discussions. This iterative process was akin to the initial stages, and engagement with communications, that new members described of their mobilisation over time.

I engaged in a flexible spectrum of performances; from full participation in gardening, to observing as an external onlooker during council meetings. Some performances were predictable; attending multiple speaker evenings provided opportunities to participate, and to focus on the speaker, their message, the effects on others, contextual details, and the practices engaged in during the event. Volunteer days were more unpredictable, depending on who was present and the tasks and resources required that day. Sometimes they provided the opportunity to switch modes, reacting to changing activities and the arrival and exit of participants. In field notes, I tried to capture these shifts, expected and unexpected engagements, which were characteristic of member mobilisation experiences in those spaces.

The variety of fieldwork activities emphasised the power relations between the research co-practitioners (see, for example, Massey 2003, Watson and Till 2010). I wanted to gain access to speakers after their speeches, but was conscious that I would be diverting their attention from other members and I was a little intimidated, mirroring my feelings during my initial mobilisation. Group interactions were characterised by such power relations between the experienced and inexperienced, and by different levels of comfort in being vocal and participating proactively. Locations and types of encounters — internal versus external campaigning with the public — had similar effects. Research comfort, mirroring participation comfort, increased through familiarity with the practices and culture of the groups. Appendix 3 describes the range of fieldwork encounters.

## **Capturing materials**

Following Crang and Cooks' (2007) recommendation, I used a list as an *aide memoire* when observing, participating, noting conversations (and their context), and writing up field notes. They borrowed six layers of description from observation to participation to self-reflection from Cloke et al. (2004), drawing attention to location, physical space of setting, others' interactions within the setting, one's own participation in interactions in that setting, reflecting on the research process, and self-reflections. They listed several questions to reflect on within each header, provided in Appendix 5. Mack et al. (2005) drew my attention to further details: appearance, verbal behaviour and interactions, physical behaviour and gestures, personal space, human traffic, and people who stand out. Attention was given to senses, emotions and the socio-spatial and temporal aspects, with the full list in Appendix 5. Conversations were noted, where possible, with attention to narratives, constructions of reality, themes, reactions and knowledge creation, and the style of conversations, claims, and power dynamics. I recorded contextual details, such as timing, location, accessibility, layout of the setting, and weather. This framework proved useful in handling the materials, though it was impossible to capture all aspects and so I naturally focused on those that stood out. There was an interactive (and iterative) process of broad observation, gradually narrowing down as themes became clearer, before finally concluding that enough materials had been generated. This co-constitutive and concurrent process of analysis is discussed in the next section.

## **Doing the analysis and writing up**

As explained earlier, analysis was ongoing, and co-constitutive with generating materials. However, here I discuss the more recent practices of analysis and writing up — where, as Pryke (2003) discusses, the document for imagined audiences and interpretive communities comes into view. I handled and analysed materials, turned ideas into prose, and made decisions about thesis structure. This phase frequently occurs once a researcher has left the field site, in the final year and at the university (Pryke 2003). However, my time on this phase was interrupted and extended. My exit from the groups was messy and partial. I continued to be involved in groups, though in different ways, and decreasingly so over time (discussed further in chapter 5). I found, despite the lingering connections, greater temporal and physical distance to the field site and co-practitioners. The co-generators of materials became more distanced as research

participants and came into focus as the one of the primary imagined audiences who, I hope, may benefit from this work. Here I consider the effects and linkages of the practices of analysis and writing up; on the practitioner (me) and the research outcomes.

### **Performing analysis practices**

Crang (2003) described the messiness, work, and creative process needed to make interpretations. For me, this involved making ethical decisions, making use of pertinent tools, and particular embodied and material practices. My broad research questions and cross-group comparison was exciting though, in hindsight, made navigating through multiple literatures and pinpointing my approach a challenge. The practice framework, with contributions from social movement literature, provided focus and also flexibility, for focusing in and drawing out during the analysis to find the most useful scale for sense-making. Seyfang and Hexaltine (2010) drawing on Bate et al. (2005) argue that political process, resource mobilisation, and new social movement theories tend to provide a reductive checklist when examining social movements. However, I found this helpful in analysis, through presences, absences, contractions, and unanswered questions to return to.

In design, I was concerned about when sufficient materials would be generated for cross-group comparison and coherent interpretation. Whilst interactions with groups and stakeholders overlap longitudinally, there was a gradual shift in focus and bodily movement through the groups and networks. The shift in focus, time and location meant eventually I stopped focusing on materials and turned attention to the more formal analysis stages. As Crang (2003) describes, there are always gaps and deficiencies (which reflexivity and writing about future research hope to address), and I found the ongoing contact during the year and beyond useful, aiding interpretations and creating unexpected benefits, as explained further below.

I managed a mix of physical and virtual materials; field notes (physical and virtual) and photos, background desk research, grassroots sustainability groups' communications, and transcripts. Technology, tools, and training were available as part of the Open University research training. Analysis tools are frequently used in ethnographic analysis practices in order to manage this multitude of materials. I used AudioNotetaker for transcription and analysis. The programme aligns the audio file and written transcript, which I then cut in to topic sections and colour-coded. This allowed easy identification of the similar topics across interviews to read and compare. I struggled with handling



NVivo and reverted to noting transcripts and field notes, using an A3 board and post-it notes, and an excel workbook to analyse and organise the materials into themes. Materials and the practice framework led to the key practices, similarities, and differences between the groups, and ultimately the structure of this thesis. This approach, whilst it suited my way of working, was not necessarily an efficient use of time.

The co-practitioners in generating materials were anonymised, as per ethical guidelines (see, for example, Ali and Kelly 2004). Appendix 3 provides the details of the interviews (date, location, group) as well as the names given to each anonymised interviewee. When they read through the consent form, I found interviewees unconcerned about being identifiable from quotes. Instead, some mentioned jovially that they would say similar things to their co-participants in the group. Whilst this might not have been true, these tended to be the core members and so I asked if there were any concerns, given their opinions were likely to more easily attributable. No concerns were expressed. This contributed to the insight that grassroots sustainability groups were characterised by the longevity of both the group and the participation of core group members. There was a co-constitutive relationship between this and the camaraderie, appreciation, and discussion of strengths and weaknesses of the core group, which in turn affected how the group and projects were managed and progressed.

A means of referencing those involved was needed for the purposes of writing up this material artefact. I found developing a satisfactory method a challenge. I considered an abstract reference e.g. Gender M/F, group reference and date. However, this captured the least important information about the person and detracted from the warm and personable research interactions. Instead I gave interviewees alternative names. This method is also unsatisfactory as there are cultural associations with names through gender, ethnicity, and perceived age. I chose what I believed to be simple common names, but continue to worry that this detracts from the understanding of groups as having particular demographic traits.

The variety of materials and number of interpersonal interactions required decisions on which details to include within my writing — particularly in relation to the face-to-face research interactions. I was constrained by the details I had gathered. I avoided asking formal background questions about age, finding it jarred the research interactions. Such details frequently appeared through more natural discussion of their participation, but

not consistently so and they were not collected during informal discussions. I therefore simply refer to informal discussions as (ID) during the following chapters.

### **Writing the thesis**

There was a natural shift in mode in writing up to a final document. As highlighted, considering the research aims, the imagined situated audiences and how they may (or may not) utilise, interpret, or translate this work affected the writing process and written presentation of my work (Pryke 2003). As a PhD student, I found, as Bingham (2003) and others describe, there are routinised research practices and writing traditions that I carry as a practitioner which are affected by the expectations of my institution and research tradition. Thus there was sanitisation of the materials (ibid.) and I have produced a traditionally structured thesis.

My re-imagination of the audiences clarified the need to produce two formats: the thesis and a report for grassroots sustainability groups. The report will focus on recommendations and reflections on methods that might help groups to research their efficacy. However, the extended timeframe means I have not delivered a timely report. In hindsight, it may have been more helpful to deliver the report prior to this thesis, which would have provided the opportunity to seek feedback and perhaps a source of further materials. Whilst the research design was not participatory, feedback on the interpretations would have been interesting to hear and, from an ethnography-as-practice perspective, would have rendered an imagined audience a more active co-practitioner during the writing phase.

There were other challenges and benefits from my extended (and interrupted) final phase. Attending evening and social events became more challenging. Time away from the project and then returning to the data and endeavouring to recapture the sense of excitement of mobilisation took time. There were also unexpected benefits. It highlighted the longevity of the groups included, their consistency in core group membership, and the durability of the practices of mobilisation. In turn this identified some of the most important ingredients of successful groups.

This longevity gives me confidence the report for groups will still be helpful. Its historic contingency and changed funding circumstances may prove beneficial and lead to consideration of new questions, such as how groups can counter the lack of funding, by sharing resources and supporting each other to greater effect. Longevity also affects

research practice, as I may be able to share my findings with many mobilised participants included within this thesis. This gives me the opportunity to explain my interpretations in a more personal, engaging manner through face-to-face presentations including descriptions of shared experiences, in turn generating interesting discussions of mobilisation of grassroots sustainability groups, and the use of research methods in groups.

Using the ethnography-as-practice approach, and aided by Pryke et al. (2003), had two benefits. It helped identify the elements of practice to consider in design and reflect upon in *doing* the research and *producing* this document — co-practitioners, audiences, materials, and bodily practices in different phases. It also helped draw parallels and interpretations with mobilisation practices, to which I turn in the following chapters.

## Conclusion

I have included reflections throughout the preceding sections of the chapter, which explained how I developed the research approach, the research design, and how research occurred in practice. Here I conclude with some final thoughts. Overall, I leave this document feeling that I followed an ethical and reflexive approach to produce interpretations that contribute to our understanding of how grassroots groups are mobilising. In turn, through the report for groups, these will be useful for grassroots sustainability groups.

The approach and methods combined reported accounts and descriptions of practices, with observations of the tacit and embedded nature and contextual characteristics of mobilisation practices. These included the more mundane and hidden alongside those practices more overtly seeking to create change. Multiple observations and participations brought attention to the small, often overlooked, details, the embedded and embodied elements of knowledge, and the bodily habits and dispositions of the co-practitioners involved (including myself). The comparison of groups provided the opportunity to move between groups, find connections, similarities and differences, and focus on the spatial context and socio-spatial relations involved. It also drew attention to the communicative practices in physical and virtual environments, and the materiality of the practices and the artefacts employed and created.

The time involved allowed the discrepancies and unanswered questions to be readdressed, as well the opportunity to give voice to a range of participants beyond those who might appear most important to the success of the groups. It allowed time to focus on the sensorial and emotional experiences, and their role in the ongoing constitution and performances of the grassroots sustainability groups' membership and culture. Attention to ethnography-as-practice drew attention to the co-constitutive effects of research on the groups, those involved, and myself, and the partial perspective and situated interpretations of the mobilisation of groups.

There are inevitably elements that worked well, and elements that worked less well. I have highlighted the inclusions and omissions, the voices heard and not heard. I believe I used good judgement, as appealed for by Pryke et al. (2003), in being flexible in solving the challenges in practice with expectations in design. I feel I behaved considerately during my group interactions, and hope they did not suffer the feeling of research abstraction they described.

One of my main concerns during design had been ethics, and balancing the benefits of access through my existing networks and working with people I know. In practice, I found prior belonging was to be embraced. My involvement in groups and existing knowledge made people *more* comfortable and willing to help. This was the case for grassroots sustainability groups and wider research co-practitioners. In analysis it became evident that it was this positionality that enabled me to approach the research and questions through a long-term comparative ethnography, and draw the parallels between research practice and mobilisation practice. In particular, many people were sympathetic to the challenges I experienced in co-launching a local group; people empathised and reflected on their own experiences. I was careful not to influence the open line of questioning and I felt interviews were more relaxed, reflective and personal than the ones I had carried out for my MSc. This was also influenced by my increased level of comfort in performing research, due to my accumulation of knowledge of the groups and contextual issues, and social connections.

I was continually learning through performing research-as-practice. Exploring senses and emotions was challenging. As predicted, this was due to the lack of cultural norms associated with discussing such matters with those who are not close friends. I also found some individuals hard to read. Senses were easier to focus on as part of my participation experiences, but were frequently interrupted due to the busy nature of tasks

being performed at group events. The effects of research practice on co-practitioners affected how performances continued. I realised that follow-up discussions were better focussed on group practices that day, rather than for revisiting points from earlier interviews. I was conscious that they wanted to enjoy themselves and get on with the task at hand, rather than be distracted by lengthy questions. Once I switched the focus, I gained more useful materials, such as what practices people enjoyed, and how they reacted to other practitioners and their environment.

I found the practice approach useful when considering research design and performance, particularly when making use of different literatures with different research traditions. It drew attention to considering the aims, skills, materialities and bodily performances, as well as the co-practitioners and research contexts. From a personal, emotional, and sensorial perspective, there were several learnings. Expect the unexpected but do not presuppose problems or panic when they occur — they can lead the research in new directions and provide opportunities to improve research practice. Be mindful of the contexts and environments of research encounters — both the physical associations and the temporal distance from the subject matter. Perhaps most importantly, relax and enjoy the research experience and ensure others involved do too. Now, I turn to discussing the materials generated.

## Chapter 4 Mobilising motivation

In this chapter, **Mobilising motivation**, I primarily address the first research question: **how and why are people participating in grassroots sustainability groups?** I explore grassroots sustainability group mobilisation from the perspective of individual participants as co-practitioners of mobilisation practices (Shove et al. 2012). I focus on motivations, the practices they identify in their descriptions of participation, and the similarities in both across the groups. As explained in chapter 2, literatures on understanding motivations of participants typically identify a limited range of concerns that are directly correlated to the core sustainability-related actions of the group (see, for example, Seyfang et al. 2010b, Walker et al. 2010b). However, my mobilisation journey was characterised by multiple and changing motivations and this was reflected in conversations with participants. I wanted to understand in greater detail why people spent time with their local grassroots sustainability groups, and what they received in return that ensured they kept volunteering. To explore this complexity and shifts in motivations, I found it useful to compare the relationship between the participants and group with dating. Each participant found an initial 'match' with the group, a main shared concern, often facilitated by an introduction from a friend. This 'match' then became a deeper 'fit' with multiple motivations being fulfilled through the activities of practice change on offer. Each 'date' then satisfied the participants' more immediate needs, which encouraged them to keep returning. Here, I explore the participants' biographies, and how they influenced their choice in this 'match', as well as the role of politics, personal identity, and community in the ongoing relationship.

Klandermans (2007) seeks to understand why participants put time and effort put into participation and explores the demand and supply aspects of social movement participation. Bringing social movement theories together, he identifies three reasons why participation appeals: people want to change their circumstances ('instrumentality'), act as part of a group ('identity'), and give meaning to the world and express their feelings and views ('ideology') (ibid.). I found this combination of the practical, social and emotive useful in understanding participants' motivations, alongside considerations of biographical influences and 'radical habitus' (Crossley 2002), which help explain participation in groups. Discussions revealed how ongoing fulfilment of motivations alongside shifts in values (Hards 2011), emotional connections, and deepening belonging (Aminzade and McAdam 2001) ensured continued participant co-performance in mobilisation practices (Shove et al. 2012). In these groups the time and

effort to participate is considerable for some, and was found to be enduring. This chapter contributes a more nuanced understanding of motivations for mobilisation in grassroots sustainability groups, longer journeys of mobilisation, and of their co-constitutive shifts through practice co-performance (Crossley 2002, Røpke 2009, Hards 2011). I also found, in accordance with the study of Transition (Seyfang 2009a,b), that grassroots sustainability groups are attracting both experienced activists and those new to environmental action, across a range of sustainability-related endeavours. The exploration of participants' perspectives also starts to identify the key practices performed by groups that help and hinder mobilisation, for further investigation in the following chapters.

As described in 3.3, the materials presented derive from 24 interviews with group participants conducted during the ethnography, in which I asked them to reflect on their motivations, biographical journeys of participation, and the practices they co-perform. Further evidence comes from informal discussions with numerous participants at events and project spaces, in which I asked brief questions, such as why they were in attendance, to elicit the more immediate reasons for attending an event or activity.

### **Structure of the chapter**

Reflecting on motivations, 4.1, discusses how participants described their motivations in interviews. I examine the connections beyond the initial 'match' to create a deeper 'fit' between participants' concerns and the group. I discuss the multiple motivations of participants, and the inclusion of both individual and communal benefits and various temporal and spatial scales. Shifting motivations, 4.2, discusses increasing specificities and shifting interests of participants over time, and the role of change and progress within continued mobilisation. Why are you here today?, 4.3, considers the more immediate motivations for participants' attendance of group activities recounted during informal discussions. I bring attention to emotional responses and the need for a sense of immediacy in personal development to ensure participants return. The influence of participants' biographies, 4.4, explores the biographies of the experienced and inexperienced across the groups, and how journeys of participation develop. The role of politics, activism and community, 4.5, considers the characteristics of the groups' inclusive culture, how they are attracting the wide range of participants, and the glue that holds the groups and network together.

## 4.1 Reflecting on motivations for participation

Here I discuss the motivations identified by the participants during the interviews. In agreement with literatures on different types of grassroots groups (see 2.1), participants in all groups confirmed an alignment between their primary concern with an environmental issue and one of the group's primary concerns (and associated solution). Participants frequently mentioned concerns about climate change, peak oil, and environmental and social sustainability. In addition, there was an appreciation that encouraging widespread behaviour change (or practice change, though the language of practices was not used) necessitated community groups to take action. There was, therefore, a successful dating 'match'.

Within their main motivation, a time imperative and urgency was expressly mentioned by several, and alluded to by many others. There was a sense that the ongoing inaction of other stakeholders must trigger action, that community action must happen now, and that individuals and communities must take responsibility. I asked Louise what prompted her action and she explained that starting a family had greatly affected her perspective, and consequently her involvement in the Energy group: 'Having your own kids, thinking about the impact of the future, all of that, kind of comes together as well. (...) [A] much less selfish perspective.' (12.06.12). Participants expressed a sense of time through concerns at a range of spatial and temporal scales. They included global environmental challenges and intergenerational responsibility, local community concerns and community-led action over the medium-term, individual behaviours and shorter-term change. These scales mirrored the discourse at the time, in both the groups and the wider media and policy; there was a time-imperative strongly featured, alongside the combination of individual behaviour change, and the role of community in its delivery, to solve urgent global environmental problems through local solutions (discussed in 1.2).

### **Expressing multiple motivations**

All participants expressed a mix of motivations rather than just one. These were identified, in part, due to the research design, aimed at eliciting more detailed understanding from the interviews, as distinct from questionnaires (highlighted in 1.2). While a main shared concern explained participants' initial engagement, I found that enrolment and involvement required a commitment, and therefore a greater depth of 'match'. This match was required both in the array of mixed motivations (why they



participated) and opportunities (how motivations were met, explained further in chapter 5). The final ingredient is the emotive attraction, namely liking the people and culture, which was emphasised the most in the involvement stage of participation (the stages are discussed in detail in chapter 5).

Analysing the primary concerns of participants revealed that there was a range along a communal to individual spectrum. For example, environmental concerns were described in global societal terms (communal) through to an imperative to reduce energy use (individual). Participants reflecting on their more complex set of motivations always included a range along the same spectrum. The communal element explains why members were involved in a group, rather than acting alone.

There was a recurring pattern in combinations of motivations:

- Environmental concern (shared with the group)
- + Sustainability-related solution (shared with group aim/offer)
- + Personal benefit
- + Communal benefit
- + Enjoyment
- = Grassroots sustainability group involvement.

### **Motivated by personal benefits**

The detail of the motivation varied considerably and was frequently more individually beneficial than I had been expecting. I had been slightly conditioned in my reading to think that volunteering and activism were selfless endeavours. However, the prominence of individual benefit in this mobilisation was understandable. The rhetoric of behaviour change, individual responsibility, and nudges (both in sustainability areas and others) created an expectation of what volunteering in this kind of group was supposed to achieve: individual change. In addition, these are not merely campaigning groups, but rather groups intentionally effecting practice change, both for individuals and for the benefit of the community. Therefore, this being reflected in participants' explanations means the groups were successfully communicating and delivering the opportunities to make such changes. Participants described how their practices were changing, and how their motivations and aims co-constitutively changed over time, in line with their actions (Röpke 2009, Hards 2011).

Motivations of personal benefits were often associated with learning, knowledge production or sharing expertise (Bradbury and Middlemiss 2014). Forms of learning included practising new skills, attending training, and seeking further information from experts. These were for personal practice changes, household changes (such as DIY or larger scale renovations), and frequently for saving money. Participants also explained they were learning for fun, as an antidote to work and, conversely, to gain job-skills and help in changing career. There was also a more communal aspect to learning, as Rose explained at the Urban Food training session:

It wouldn't sink in if I just looked on Google. And I wouldn't have the confidence to do it by myself. But doing the training with [Emma], you were there too right? Well, it made it seem more do-able. I don't think I'll ever be green fingered but I'll do some growing at home now (...) and permaculture, that was fascinating, I thought it was something completely different! (Rose ID)

Many participants, explaining why they sought knowledge in the communal setting, mentioned the benefits of learning from experts, learning together, and co-creating knowledges. These, alongside hands-on learning — through repeated practice performance — shifted practice competence (Shove et al. 2012).

For core group members, there was a combination of learning (through managing the group and projects), but also a desire to share their competence, and, in some cases, a wish to lead. Skills on offer included work experience in relevant sectors such as academia, sustainability, engineering, waste, the oil industry, and community organisations. Some had built significant experience in community organising over the years. More general skills were also highlighted by participants, such as legal, networking and project management, to which I return in chapter 7. Debbie from the Energy group explained she had professional skills to offer:

The main thing that kind of motivated me into going to work each day was that I could sort of network with these people, I had the involvement of the group, I guess I got a buzz out of it, so when I left ... I was looking for something within the community that I guess kind of replicated ... it's not all an altruistic thing; I am obviously looking to get something out of it as well, meeting people. But I think everybody benefits. ... I could use my skills, that whole thing about giving back to the community. (12.07.12)

She discussed the change in her work situation and her recent engagement with the group, which was her first foray into community-led action. The professional culture and structure of the Energy group both provided a role where she could use her

professional skills, and provided an environment where she benefited from the sense of contribution and community she had enjoyed previously.

The social side was the other most frequently highlighted individual benefit. Participants wanted to have fun. They mentioned socialising, networking, enjoying belonging to a group, relaxation and well-being, and escaping from pressures of work. Most of all they highlighted the importance of meeting 'like-minded people'. When I asked what that meant, answers revealed that, for some, their friends, family or colleagues did not feel the same way about sustainability-related concerns. Within the group they felt a greater sense of belonging. For others it was more active; it gave them the opportunity to discuss topics that they were passionate about with those who also cared. It felt 'normal' to discuss them in depth (Interviews and IDs).

### **Motivated by communal benefits**

I am not suggesting that communal reasons were somehow diminished. As seen above, there was often a communal element within the more individual-led benefit stated. Communal benefits were also frequently mentioned, notably in the case of core-group members. Participants talked about the group as a community, and (wider) community development and action, often due to political inaction. As Karen, from the Energy group and the Borough Network, explained:

When the Government is being so lackadaisical about its environmental agenda, people who are actually getting out there and doing things on the ground. I think is very exciting and very empowering and very positive to actually make a difference. (28.05.12)

This also suggests an individual benefit; she was personally inspired by the communal action. Similarly, Wendy, who was involved in Transition and the Nurture group, highlighted the positive effects of communal activity:

A sense of meaning, a sense of purpose and I just do think we're all learning a lot together; it seems to be a lot of knowledge and a lot of sharing knowledge. People sharing stories about their lives, a lot of yes, a lot of communication, a lot of places for people to share ideas. Those are all the positive aspects I think...and sharing risk together. (22.05.12)

For her, this communal connection was multi-layered and provided mutual support through learning and sharing ideas. For those in core groups and those who described their involvement as regular, sharing and enjoyment with others, communication, and camaraderie featured highly. For those who discussed the evolution of their motivations,

there was a shift toward the communal over time, co-constitutive of their deepening involvement with the group.

The role of community was highlighted by many participants across all the groups. I was struck by its wide-ranging role. There were benefits *for* the community from the mobilisation of groups, such as spreading the word, building community networks and a sense of community, giving back to the community and even increasing community competitiveness. There were benefits *from* the wider community for the group, such as the valuable resource of existing strong community connections (i.e. capacity) in building the group, as discussed by Middlemiss and Parrish (2009). Leadership was related, with participants explaining it was essential that the community takes a leadership position because action by the community is more effective. Some also cited setting a good example for others, both as individual participants and as groups. There were frequent mentions of motivations associated with identity, social connections and networks, giving back to the community, fostering well-being, and the benefits of belonging to a group. This resonates with the identity and ideology drivers of movement participation identified by Klandermans (2007).

### **Differences in motivations between the groups**

As described, the groups provided a place and time to connect with those with similar concerns, to build a sense of togetherness and positive action. This sociality showed some variation between the Energy group and the food-related groups, with a stronger focus on these aspects for the latter. This difference between the groups is, in part, explained by the food-related projects involving being outside together in green spaces, and having aspects of significant transformation: re-wilding and nurture, urban food growing and guerrilla gardening, and foraging. Food-related group participants frequently mentioned the physical nature of the space and of their involvement, as well as enjoying watching the project develop. Conversely, members of the Energy group were offered fewer opportunities for physical work, and therefore motivations associated with bodily endeavours were more often associated with household changes rather than communal practices. These practices and their embodied performances are discussed further in chapters 5 and 6.

At the more general level, the group and the participants shared a concern and desired solution. These were practice-changed-oriented and involved learning, contributing, leading, and creating change. The answers relating to belonging were tied into

interpersonal networks being built through socialising and having fun, both essential ingredients of group action. At the more detailed level, there were differences between the groups, aligned with the specific activities on offer. The participants described these in instrumental terms (Klandermans 2007). Those involved in Nurture shared motivations concerning learning to grow food, saving money, personal well-being, access to local/affordable food, creating a community space (and socialising), and long-term food resilience. In the Transition group, concerns centred more on community-resilience, with interests in food, carbon, transport, and in knowledge production and saving resources through re-skilling, in line with the Transition ethos (Hopkins 2008b). I noted most of the action was focused in their food-growing project, Urban Food. In the Foraging group, the concerns were narrow, in hand with the groups' offering, and were both individual (picking food) and communal (developing knowledge and self-sufficiency in the city). Those in the Borough Network were concerned with sharing knowledge across groups and political impact. In the Energy group, concerns identified included carbon reduction, saving money, changes to the household, and developing renewable energy for the local community.

For those in the Energy group, further macro-external influences were cited, including the discourse and policy at the time (see 1.2), which created both political and resource opportunities (expanded upon in Chapter 6 and 7). Participants both reacted against inaction, but also talked about behaviour change and needing to encourage large-scale community reduction in emissions, and explained their success, in part, through the funding they had received. I found it interesting that food-related groups rarely mentioned these same external influences, though some associated food miles with carbon dioxide emissions reduction. One lunchtime, in the Urban Food group, there was a discussion about how participants envisaged large-scale local food growing in the city, and how this would have a more significant effect than smart meters on reducing carbon (ID). Diane, a member of both Nurture and Urban Food, lamented the lack of resources and funding available for food projects, and how the group relied instead on the community pitching in with resources when needed (25.05.12). There was a shared sense that food growing was under-resourced.

Despite those involved in food firmly linking their mobilisation with sustainability, there were some differing opinions on whether action on energy and action on food was equivalent. I asked Lucy about the differences between the Nurture and the Energy groups. She drew together issues of space, the body and a difference in aims:

It's because you're actually doing something physical aren't you, you're going to spend time with people as well, you're going for your leisure, aren't you? You're not necessarily going to a meeting about boilers for your leisure, are you? (laughs) So it's a different thing isn't it, you're going to have a picnic in nature because people are doing it to feel good, they get a lot out of planting a tree (...) I suppose their motivation isn't sustainability whereas if you're joining a group that is trying to reduce carbon emissions, then your motivation is because you want to do something about it. (08.02.12)

My discussions found some others agreed with her explanation separating physical/leisure activities (in food-related action) from action on the home (in energy-related action). Aside from this spatial differentiation, she also differentiated on the basis of motivation, equating carbon emissions action with sustainability, whilst food growing was an individual pleasure. This was interesting, as Lucy was heavily involved in the Nurture group, which *was* concerned with sustainability, though in a different way to the Energy group, which employed her. She appeared to be separating the motivations of participants from those of the groups, and was reflecting the prevailing discourse associating sustainability solutions with energy endeavours (see 1.2). Here, the motivations of participants diverged with her explanation; they *were* concerned with sustainability, amongst the mix of individual and communal benefits, and some *did* think about food in terms of carbon dioxide emissions reduction.

A clear difference between food and energy was the link in the Energy group between their sustainability endeavours and measurable results such as savings on their bills. Whilst it was rarely cited as their primary motivation, I noted in the Energy group that success and measured results inspired ongoing action. Again, this was influenced by the wider policy and discourse — and therefore the measurable, carbon-reducing actions were considered to be more effective by some. This resonated with Crossley (2002) who, in his discussion of Bourdieu and symbolic power, explains how some frames (in this case, particular solutions around energy) are elevated over others (e.g. food) in this form of mobilisation.

### **Reflecting on complex motivations**

Participants found an initial 'match' between their primary concern with an environmental issue and one of the group's primary concerns. Motivations were also multiple, involving both individual and communal benefits. A deeper 'fit' was required;

between multiple motivations and multiple opportunities to be involved, and an attraction to the people and culture of the group. The motivations combined personal and communal benefits and were characterised by being practice-change-oriented. Together these resonate with Klandermans' (2007) explanation of the attraction of movement participation: instrumentality, identity and ideology.

The differences in the details of the match across groups were due to what was on offer: the physical spaces, repertoires of action, and practices in which the participants could co-perform (Shove et al. 2012, Martin 2013). The differences between the groups were also imagined by the participants: a type of 'othering' influenced by the dominant discursive framing at the time (Crossley 2002), which played a role in identity in groups (discussed further in chapters 5 and 6). The temporal shifts and transformations in space, practice effects, and opportunities to participate were all important and varied between the groups. I turn to shifting motivations associated with these temporal experiences of participation in the next section.

## **4.2 Shifting motivations**

Whilst discussing the multiplicity of motivations, I also noted shifts in them over time. Changing motivations were not always clearly expressed by interviewees. However, I noticed developing passions, discourse and, sometimes, a direct expression of dynamism in motivations. In particular, I noted shifts in specificity of needs and interests over time.

For some participants, there was a clear increase in specificity within their motivations over time, which tended to be associated with the more communal benefits. Communal motivations at the start of participation were in some ways imagined, and concerned with generalised ideas of community and building resilience, without any specific description of what this meant. These motivations became more specific; what the community benefit was, the scale, and where it was located, depending on the group's activities and geography. For example, for the Urban Food group, it was related to the project space, the park in which it was located, as well as the local residents who came and volunteered. In the Energy group, more experienced members referred to Muswell Hill, and frequently to the benefits of the Low Carbon Zone (LCZ). Specificity came with increased knowledge about the group's endeavours through participation,

discussions with other members, and through the communications received from the group.

With ongoing involvement, communal motivations also became increasingly about the benefits of being in the group, as Wendy explained:

A deep sense of family has happened very, very quickly I would say. (Pause)  
Even the people who I've struggled with, there's two or three people or something but...I feel like every single person is really amazing and really interesting.  
(Transition 22.05.12)

For Wendy, the focus was her co-practitioners, their qualities and how close-knit the group had become. Laura from the Energy group also highlighted the sociality, togetherness, and emotional support. After discussing her initial reasons for joining, I asked her what kept her involved: 'Now? It's about the team, the core group who support each other. We have to think about what's going here (she pointed around) as much as trying to change out there' (22.07.12). Support and camaraderie featured in other participants' descriptions of their involvement; particularly those with deeper participation in the core group. Laura's explanation also highlighted the importance of focusing on the development of the core group as the powerhouse of the groups' endeavours. I return to this in chapter 7.

Other motivations exhibited increasing specificity, most notably in the Energy group. I concluded this change was due to the complexity of group activities, in comparison to the other groups, with participants initially having a very general understanding of the group's offering. They then found out more about the projects as they became involved, resulting in their aims becoming more aligned to those projects. I asked about the effects of increased knowledge in follow-up discussions. Linda responded that her thirst for knowledge grew as she became involved, Susan confirmed that opportunities for action and education galvanised her to consider further household changes, and Chris confirmed (from a more managerial perspective) that the more he became involved, the more he realised his professional skills were required (IDs).

I also noted shifts in the interests of participants. These shifts in attention were associated with involvement in a new practice (or set of practices in a new project). For new participants, everything was new. For those in the involvement stage, this was when the group continued to offer new opportunities. Thus the initial 'match' in concerns turned into a greater 'fit'; which deepened or became more specific as



participation progressed. The shift could be dramatic or subtle.

At an Energy group event, for example, Diana explained she was concerned about water, had recently addressed her water use at home, and she was very keen on DIY (ID). We later attended a large event together on draught proofing, and then subsequently met again at a workshop on DIY installation. Her aims, enthusiasm and knowledge shifted, and therefore her motivations. She happily explained: 'Now I'm obsessed with wandering round the house and feeling for draughts to plug up' (ID). From my experiences, I noted both a dramatic shift from my initial interest in energy to food, as well as subtler changes. I became interested in food miles, and experimenting with buying local food and changing my diet. I perhaps would not have expressed these as initial motivations for joining the group, but learning and experimenting became integral to ongoing motivations to attend.

There were elements of experimentation, alterity, novelty, education (both given and received), and competition embedded in the motivations and their shifts. I use all these words as the responses were inflected with slightly different emphases, though I feel these were related. The practice through which they were experienced, however, was different, and it was in relation to discussions about particular practices that these motivations emerged (rather than the explicit questions about motivations). For example, Emma explained her excitement at meeting new people and sharing her knowledge in training at Urban Food (25.06.12). Natasha discussed her enjoyment of the co-production of knowledge in recipes for foraged food (15.06.12). Chris explained his friendly rivalry and competitive impulses, particularly with neighbouring projects:

I keep asking myself if there's any element of self-glorification in it ...That wasn't my motivation, my motivation ...[was]... we've got to do this thing, you know we won't have any slackers. And so I am a bit target driven (pause) I didn't want us to end up lower down the scale than Sutton, Surrey or Archway next door, that would be awful to be seen off by Archway, now I've got that little sort of competitive thing which I quite enjoy. (Energy 06.04.12)

These less-spoken-about motivations and effects of participation are embedded in sustainability group practices; as will be discussed further in the subsequent chapters. It is not surprising that participants join to make changes, but these findings emphasise that, for ongoing involvement, this change (whether it be to a particular practice by design, or through sharing knowledge with new practitioners) must be ongoing. Given the aim of the groups is to change practices, they also indicate that the groups were

successfully achieving their aims.

Change indicated a progression; not just of the projects themselves (which was inspiring), but also a meaningful sense of personal development. This positively affected the individuals' capacities and also those of the groups (Middlemiss and Parrish 2009). Environmental values shifted through participation (Hards 2011), and individuals' aims, resources, and competences shifted through practice performance (Röpke 2009, Shove et al. 2012). Put another way, the groups were succeeding in changing practices, and these practices contributed to both individual and group mobilisation. This relationship was crucial in the groups. Underlying all the motivations was a desire to create immediate and demonstrable change. This, and the immediacy of seeing or feeling the change, was a characteristic feature of the grassroots sustainability groups, and a characteristic need of their participants, who are practice change and progress-orientated. This was seen in both the longer-term reflections, the descriptions of shifting motivations, and in the more immediate explanations for attendance, to which I now turn.

## 4.3 Why are you here today?

Alongside the reflexive time in interviews, I asked participants at group activities why they were present. These more informal discussions about motivations within group spaces, such as volunteer days, talks, and workshops garnered different responses. They were more closely associated with the nature and impacts of the current activities and character of the group and space. Relating to the dating analogy again, as well a fit between participant and the group, each 'date' needs to be fun and fulfil a more immediate need. This encouraged participants to return.

### **Similarities in accessing expertise and the importance of social networks**

Across the groups, participants frequently explained their attendance that day through individual benefits. These included learning by doing or watching someone perform a practice, and access to expertise for activities such as volunteer days, workshops, and speaker events. For newcomers, this was based on the groups' reputation, often built through their social networks sharing information to entice them to engage. For longer-term members, this was tacitly understood through previous practice performance. The expertise was centred on practice change; either through the physical performance, or

the content of talks, which always included discussion of environmental problems and their solutions. It being interesting and fun, unsurprisingly, was crucial.

Frequently participants talked about re-learning lost skills. In follow-up conversations this was explained as an intergenerational difference several times in both food-related groups and the Energy group. Joseph explained that the generational shifts are to do with finances: ‘We outsource all this stuff now. But my Dad would fix the windows, the plumbing, everything at home. There wasn’t the money for everything new; you just had to fix it’ (30.04.12). We went on to discuss how these changes affected his participation in the group and attendance at the workshop. He explained that, for a more sustainable future, individuals have to make material changes to their homes to decrease energy use, and the means of doing this was through improving our competence: ‘We all need to be able to do it ourselves, and find the cheaper ways of cutting our bills ...and help our neighbours to do it too’ (ibid.).

Alex, in our informal discussion at the Nurture group, similarly highlighted the intergenerational changes in food growing skills:

My mum grew lots of food... A lot of that was to do with the war. Funnily enough, though, her garden became more of the traditional pretty annuals type<sup>16</sup> as she got older. I only have a small space to grow in, but I’d like to get better at it and apply for an allotment eventually. (ID)

She described not only a need to improve competence but also the changes in the way we live and having access to growing space. There was also an interesting gendering, through the discussions with Joseph and Alex, of these lost skills, aligned with the more traditional familial roles of that generation.

Another similarity was the role of social networks in driving immediate attendance. The restricted resources of groups meant that advertising was limited and there were some mentions of posters, flyers, and event details sent digitally that had caught the eye of newcomers and members alike. However, it was social networks that were the essential distributive mechanism of this information; being brought along by a friend, being forwarded information by someone who thought they would be interested, or through other groups and networks (which the groups used to expand their reach). The role of social connections in driving participation, as well as the benefits of building up new social networks, was also highlighted in reflections on longer-term influences on

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<sup>16</sup> Meaning annual flowers as opposed to the perennial edible plants at the project.

mobilisation.

During the events and activities, I observed how social networks continued to have a role. Friends performed introductions and explained the layout of the space, the day, and the required tasks. This immediately helped make newcomers feel involved and more comfortable. In absentia, shared connections (and other shared interests) were discussed between newcomers and those more involved, helping facilitate conversations. For the longer-term participants, the social time was where their networks were maintained and strengthened — the conversations were friendly and relaxed. Topics of discussion were practice-change-orientated and sociable; about the projects, the tasks, and about how people were doing. Longer-term participants often mentioned this sociality as a reason for their attendance that day. The phrase ‘catching up’ was often used to refer to both the project space and their friends within, and they emphasised the immediacy and enjoyable nature of socialising and celebrating projects’ progress.

### **Differences in project space and daily practices**

Just as in the interviews, the differences between groups in explanations for attending that day were associated with project space and daily practices. Particular aspects of the project space or location were a draw. For example, a fixed location of the Urban Food and the Nurture groups enabled people to come and go and decide on their attendance based on the weather. The Foraging group inspired attendance based on the monthly topic, with attendees citing the particular plant being gathered or the task (such as plant identification or grafting public trees) being of interest (IDs). The Energy group was less flexible in this regard, with set start and finish times of the talks, stalls, and workshops and so, similarly, participants were driven by an interest in the subject or task. Many highlighted the local proximity, and associated convenience, in all the groups.

The physical nature of practice performance was also cited within explanations of attendance for the food-related groups. These had multiple effects. Participants described the impact on their senses and emotions. One participant mused: ‘it’s so peaceful down here. I do some work, I relax and enjoy the quiet’ (Urban Food ID). Another explained: ‘making the cob is so therapeutic, it’s like crushing grapes’ (Nurture ID). Volunteering days were often described as an antidote to work for those in office based jobs, as well as a learning opportunity for those who were more concerned with

finding work. Building confidence in one's competence to change practices alone was also cited. One attendee at a training course explained: 'now I'll be confident enough to go and make these changes at home' (Urban Food ID).

The visceral involvement of taste, through the sharing of food, was mentioned frequently in the Urban Food group, which involved a shared lunch. All those attending the Foraging group events, where shared dishes made from foraged ingredients were integral to the event, highlighted this ritual. Whilst on a foraging walk, Anita explained the attraction of taste and learning about produce: 'Nettles....nettles...I didn't know you could eat nettles! So I had to come along and taste them. Amy always makes such lovely concoctions that I was intrigued' (ID). She was a regular attendee and explained she was confident that the event experiences would be fun, informative, and include a range of tasty recipes. Tasting and sharing was also part of the social glue, through a potluck meal at the Borough Network, with attendance motivated by sharing stories and celebrating achievements. Helen, an active member in the Borough Network explained at one of the networking events: 'It's all about sharing — sharing successes, sharing problems and sharing food. And if we are lucky, one of Amy's cocktails' (ID). This sentiment, of food and conversation, appeared throughout interactions, in all the groups and in our research encounters over tea and cake in cafes, or picnics in growing spaces. In the Energy group, food did not actively feature in explanations for attendance. However, I observed that food and social time *was* included at some events. Everyone remained to eat and chat, and that was where social networks were constructed. However, it was after the main business had been concluded, and was not a means of demonstrating the subject matter, which explains why it did not feature in participants' rationale. These practices are explored further in chapter 6.

### **Being active in public spaces**

Some participants were also motivated to contribute to forms of more direct public engagement. I participated in two endeavours, noting the motivations, discourse, and the practices involved differed to other group activities. I volunteered to help at the Energy group's campaigning stall on the main high street. This inspired around 20 volunteers from the group who held banners and gathered signatures. At the end of the morning, Jon explained the benefits and challenges of volunteering:

I've never done anything like this before, waved a placard. It's hard — people avoid making eye contact. But we've managed to get loads of signatures on the petition too, that's very rewarding. (ID)

Others talked about the benefits of visibility and engaging with the public. Some were a little nervous of ‘accosting people’ (IDs). Campaigning was a challenging practice. Even though the subject matter was apolitical and practice change focused (the petition was to change rules about supermarket packaging), we were standing in people’s line of travel and attempting to catch their eye in order to strike up a conversation. Many studiously avoided our gazes and crossed the road to avoid us altogether. However, the group felt energised at the end of the day when we saw how successful the efforts had been, and heard positive reports of signing people up to be contacted about joining the group.

The Urban Food group engaged in guerrilla gardening at an untended street planter opposite the park. Those involved talked about how they enjoyed the visibility of their efforts and their hope of encouraging people to treat the space with more care. This effort was complementary to the usual project activities where progress was more gradual. They explained that this change was immediate and more striking visually; with the growing site cleaned up of rubbish and some seedlings and seeds added. Sadly, on my next visit the rubbish had returned. The effects of both of these public endeavours were interestingly dual in nature. Participants of both explained their more impactful, immediate, and publicly visible effects. I noted that they also both had much longer and unknown impacts: with potential new members (for the Energy group) and a potential miniature edible landscape (for the Nurture group). Participants explained how these activities engaged them in a new way, and created an immediate sense of change, greater impact and excitement (IDs).

Asking about more immediate reasons for attendance contributes a more nuanced understanding of motivations, and of how participation fulfilled both long-term and more immediate motivations. There is a temporality in the instrumentality, identity, and ideology aspects identified by Klandermans (2007), which shifts depending on the practices being performed. As participation in these groups is characterised by practice change and progression, the day-to-day experiences are crucial in providing that immediate sense of change. Shifts in practitioner competence and the materials of practice performance are important in both the short and long term (Shove et al. 2012). The social, emotional, physical, and sensorial aspects of participation are also foregrounded, as are the immediacy of effects and role of sociality, enjoyment, and social networks (Diani 1992, Aminzade and McAdam 2001). These are investigated further through discussion of practices in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

## 4.4 The influence of participants' biographies

After discussing motivations, I asked participants about how they had become involved. They often referred to biographical influences. These affected the development of radical habitus (Crossley 2002) and effected the development of environmental values (Hards 2011), through practices performed before and during mobilisation.

Many noted influences from their childhood. These included their parents' political interests and activities. Louise, who was relatively new to grassroots action, explained:

You can never underestimate the influence of parents and what they are...and I would say that my dad has actually always been saving energy, stop putting the heating up high, he was going on about carbon footprints back in the '90s. (Energy 12.06.12)

Louise described how she had been interested in sustainability issues and community-led solutions for some time, in part due to this childhood influence. However, she had only recently been mobilised after leaving her job. Louise described her comfort with the professional culture of the group. She described a grassroots sustainability habitus (perhaps in contrast to a more 'radical habitus') affected by childhood and professional work life (Crossley 2002). She was a 'skilled player' and familiar with the shared repertoire of contention of the group (ibid. referring to Bourdieu (undated) and Tilly 1995), which explained her comfort with the group and commitment to their efforts.

Several participants highlighted school education and projects they had worked on. Others mentioned general awareness of the issues from television programmes, with the children's news show *Newsround* nostalgically cited as influential more than once. More recent work experiences also played an important role for many. This varied, often with work experiences directly triggering the concern, and changing work circumstances enabling involvement. For Paul, there were several work-related factors that affected his mobilisation:

In my working life I was mainly curator of ancient and modern physics (...) so I had a lot of involvement with these issues over a long period of time and you know was very familiar with government policy and I've toured most of the nuclear sites in the UK for example (...) so I was very familiar with the policy world which was gearing up because of climate change. I went to a whole series of meetings, for the Energy Review as it then was, as I was quite interested and clearly the government policy has a very important role to play but I was also

increasingly aware that communities had a role to play, individuals had a role to play. (Energy 03.04.12)

Here he describes how his career history, expertise, and professional experiences all contributed to his becoming an activist on his retirement, when he had time to commit to his local group. Other members mentioned their professional journeys in academia, sustainability-related sectors, and community organising. Some noted a similar impetus to my own: escaping a career centred on encouraging consumption.

A common factor across the groups was a change in working status. Retirement, redundancy or changing career explained participants having time and seeking new skills. Other transformative events included having children, though this did not explain their journey to participation, but rather a reduction in available time and therefore changing participation patterns. There were also smaller moments of realisation. Participants remembered key articles or films that captured their imagination, and propelled them to find out more. Others described how becoming involved in particular sustainability-related projects, such as at work, or other communities of practice, encouraged them toward mobilisation in a community-led group, after becoming both more aware of sustainability-related concerns but also through seeing the benefits and successes of grassroots action.

### **Experienced participants and newcomers**

There were some differences in biographical influences between those with previous experience of activism, and those without. These differences in experience were more apparent than differences between the groups, which correspond with the idea of the longer-term building of activist habitus and influence on mobilisation (Crossley 2002).

The more experienced participants tended to have stronger childhood influences, and previous political activity, and / or group participation. Some spoke of their historic activism in similar terms to those who referred to their professional experiences. Their activist histories played a similarly crucial role in their life stories. Some described political engagement from teenage years, often becoming vegetarian. Their actions tended to continue through multiple forms, with many referring to environmental concerns, and some to other issues such as poverty and social justice. Some reminisced upon marches they attended. One member, for example, described her involvement at Greenham Common in the 1980s (Linda 12.04.12). Relatedly, I also sensed, for some, their ongoing interest was more politically-motivated alongside their focus on practice



change. Helen, active in the Borough Network, explained her current participation was due to long-term interest in both politics and activism, though ‘although I’d been involved in political movements I’ve never really done community politics, until the last ten years’ (04.04.12). On her retirement, she became active with her residents’ association and, following that, the borough-wide network of residents’ associations, and latterly the Borough Network. She explained her background in sociology, skills in community organising, and her interest in the east-west borough divide. This drove her passion for inclusive environmentalism, which encouraged all communities across the borough to be involved, and be supported by the network.

Those with less previous experience of groups tended to be more influenced by recent work experience, and by joining other communities of practice at work, or in the community, which in turn precipitated an appreciation of the benefits of participation in groups. For example, Debbie explained that she had been inspired by a work campaign on recycling of mugs and bags and, upon her redundancy, wanted to continue her newly-inspired interest. Consequently, she joined the Energy group (12.07.12). Here, participation in practices elsewhere had affected practitioners’ aims and competence; in practices both related to sustainability and general group mobilisation (Shove et al. 2012).

### **Influences on their current patterns of participation**

As the stories of Helen, Louise and Debbie illustrated, available time was a strong theme across all the groups. Participants became more involved with community mobilisations when life events created ‘more time’ in their daily lives. In the Energy group, participants frequently mentioned their retirement from academic or scientific backgrounds to explain their time availability and interest in the topic of carbon dioxide emissions reduction. In food-related groups, participants frequently cited a change of career, with careers mentioned more mixed, and participants slightly younger.

Participants tended to mention external circumstances first, but further conversation revealed that they had also made a conscious decision to find more time for their mobilisation. As Alex explained at the Nurture group, ‘I’m so busy, but I love this place. As long as it’s sunny, I can always find time to come’ (ID). They had time to be involved, and were attracted to the group. Others expressed the view that lack of time was not an excuse and that, if one was sufficiently concerned or motivated to act, then time could be created (IDs). Finding the right group to fit into, and committing to it, was

part of the overall time commitment. Their mobilisation was fun but also required some effort.

Some participants were also active in other kinds of environmental activism, such as through Friends of the Earth. Journeys of participation also included multiple memberships of grassroots sustainability groups, those included in this thesis, and others across the Borough Network and beyond. The groups were typically relatively close in location to each other due to where the participant lived. Participants gave several reasons for their multiple memberships. The main driver was that they gained something different from each organisation they were involved with. Natasha explained that in her quest to re-train herself, she was learning about permaculture at Urban Food, foraging skills through the Foraging group and, she explained cheerfully 'it keeps me out of trouble. What a great way to spend my summer', highlighting her enjoyment of her multiple memberships (15.06.12). There were also other reasons given. Diane explained how she shifted between the Urban Food and Nurture groups depending on their requirements for her building skills. In her case, she had limited time to contribute her professional competence, and therefore distributed it according to need (25.05.12). Some had more practical reasons. Ben loved being outside, and was work-free on Sundays, for joining the Nurture group, and Tuesday afternoons, where he joined a Transition growing project at the local library (22.07.12). Entwined with these more instrumental explanations for wide repertoires of action, were the more social and, in particular, the social networks between groups (Diani 1992, Klandermans 2007). The Urban Food and Nurture groups shared resources and seedlings, and members. There was also crossover with the Energy group and Nurture, in part due to Lucy having an official role in both. Natasha, Diane and Ben all cited an introduction between groups through a friend from one group. This pattern was repeated across other participants I met at different group events.

Discussing biographies highlighted that journeys to participation in groups are influenced by many factors. Whilst outreach work by groups (and other environmental organisations) may not create an immediate increase in participation, it plays a part in increasing participation in groups and activism generally over time. The 'activist habitus' can be built gradually (Crossley 2002). Given how these groups also encourage new participation, it was interesting to understand how this can be an interrupted process; with some newcomers influenced in childhood and only more recently triggered to act. Grassroots groups also offer a different form of inclusive

environmentalism (which I discuss further in the next section), which attracts the experienced and newcomers alike. Our discussions revealed how more mundane and non-activist experiences in different fields also contributed to mobilisation, and created a match between participant and group through shared repertoires of (more practice-oriented and apolitical) contention (ibid.). Participants also carried competence from performing dispersed practices (in different fields) that also appeared in the integrative practice-bundle of mobilisation in the groups (Schatzki 1996, Crossley 2002, Shove et al. 2012). Practices such as socialising, leadership, networking, and collaborating are discussed further in chapter 7.

## **4.5 The role of politics, activism and community**

Thus far I have explained that motivations are multiple and shifting, a mix of individual and communal benefits, practice change and progress-oriented, and that there are complex journeys to participation. In 4.4 I highlighted the different ways that participants' habitus and performance of practices in other fields affects their mobilisation (Crossley 2002). Here I expand on the different nature of the environmentalism in these groups: apolitical and inclusive. To do that I look at what the participants understood of their participation based on three patterns I noticed in the discourse of individuals and the groups. First, was the lack of mention of politics and the rare mention of environmentalism. Second, was the variation in terms participants used to describe themselves. Third, was the use of the term 'community', the meaning of which I delved into with the participants.

### **The role of politics**

There was no mention of politics or protest as a direct explanation for motivations for mobilisation, other than the lack of politically-directed progress on global environmental challenges. Their omission in the groups' aims and vernacular may explain their lack of specification by participants. Similarly, there was little political discussion during the groups' activities. There was mention of international climate targets (driven by the media discourse at the time), but little along party political lines. Louise from the Energy group explained, 'it's just not what we talk about. We are focused on the end... the community leading action... how we can make a difference'. I asked if that was always the case in their core group interactions, and she continued:

It's funny, of course sometimes someone goes on a bit of a rant, but usually we

are trying to figure out what we can benefit from — like the LCZ, we joined forces with the council to get that funding. (12.06.12)

Collaboration with the council was mentioned frequently in both the Energy group and the Borough Network, in relation to resources they could gain from the council and about projects in which both partners benefited. I observed that the council was rarely mentioned in the food-related groups and the absence of other political discussion was also striking. Instead, discussions were firmly centred on practice change and solutions to environmental issues through growing food and sourcing locally, or on more immediate project concerns. The lack of political discussion was linked, therefore, to the aims of the group. A focus on practice change rather than politics was embedded in its culture, communications, and internal face-to-face discourse.

I had been expecting more references to environmental action in an expression of self-identity of individuals, as a demonstration of their commitment, or as a form of ‘virtue signalling’ (Holzer 2006). However, this was rarely the case. Any discussion of other action was again practice-centric rather than identity-centric. Helen compared her group action to that of the local Friends of the Earth group:

Friends of the Earth, they do some great stuff. A lot of the traditional stuff, protests and the like. I suppose they are sort of parallel to what we do. We ask everyone on the list to sign the petitions and go along to meetings, but it is a bit separate. (04.04.12)

Other participants also highlighted this idea of the groups fulfilling a different role to other kinds of environmental action.

There were more discussions of politics at the Borough Network meetings. These included recent developments in governmental policy, or lack thereof, and the associated challenges and opportunities facing the groups. The most common discussion was directed at the council; on one hand, complaining about their lack of action on ongoing local development issues and, on the other, the good work of the councils Green Team on, for example, the Haringey 40:20 programme. Thus whilst more directly political, the discourse of the group remained practice-change-oriented and focused on the resources and capacities of the groups (Bate et al. 2005, Middlemiss and Parrish 2009, Seyfang and Haxeltine 2010).

### **The role of activism**

I have generally referred to those involved in groups as participants. Participants rarely

used term 'activist'. Some of those with previous experience of civic action used the word 'activist' in their biographies, but it was rarely in conjunction with the group. Similarly, core members also shunned the word when talking about the group, though it was mentioned in other contexts. The groups' communications did not refer to activists. The terms most commonly used were 'member' and 'volunteer', which referred to a form of membership or activity.

This lack of 'activism' in the groups was associated with different conceptualisations of what participation in groups entailed, versus what environmentalism or activism entailed. For example, Louise explained her scientific background as to why she felt at home in the Energy group:

I suppose if I was to categorise myself I'm not at the kind of...the sandal wearing flats, all of that end of the eco-spectrum, I'm at the what can you practically do end and I think that's what struck me with [the Energy group] was that it was about stuff that would make a difference and was about practical action, there wasn't a whole philosophy or religion behind it, it was practical action. So I felt at home there. (12.06.12)

Her explanation of how she found a match in culture with the group distanced both herself and the group from what she perceives traditional environmentalism to be. She went on to suggest that this makes the group more welcoming to a broader range of participants. From my observations of the group, they instead attracted those who found its professional reputation appealing. Therefore, it was inclusive in that it attracted non-traditional activists, though possibly just as limiting in appeal as other groups with differing cultures.

Another perspective about the differing cultures of groups came from Helen. She described her involvement in the Borough Network and other local growing projects. I asked about different kinds of action in the borough and she focused more on the type of people involved:

An awful lot of the groups in [the Borough Network] are groups that would put on an odd Green event or doing a growing event or whatever and I'm not really involved in those. I mean like Transition [which] is quite sort of feely touchy type thing and lots of people love that, and so I think they attract that sort of feely touchy people, but I think they seem to get things going don't they and organise events. (04.04.12)

She intimates that their 'fluffy' nature (a term she used earlier in the interview and

associated, as Louise did, with the more traditional perception of environmental activism) affects their efficacy, and was slightly grudging in her acknowledgement that this alternative culture was resulting in mobilisation.

There were other passing mentions of distinguishing features of other groups. Words such as ‘fluffy’, ‘stuffy’, and ‘militant’ were used. This was interesting, as often those highlighting these differences were also those who were heavily involved in cross-group networking and collaborative projects. There was always a jovial and sometimes a competitive edge to the othering. I felt it was a feature of their good-natured relationships and a way of staking their territory within the wider network of local action. I do not wish to overstate the importance of these varying perceptions. The similarities between the groups were more commonly talked about, particularly in suggestions of ‘other interesting groups’ to go and talk to in the network, with an almost sisterly fondness and offers of introductions. The groups were frequently described as having shared characteristics, such as their focus on hands-on and experimental action, being community-led and benefitting the community.

I concluded that the use of the more neutral words ‘member’ and ‘volunteer’ reflected the variation in perspectives of those involved the groups and avoided any preconceptions of what the group might be about for those new to the group and/or community action. Whilst a more ‘activist’ tone might have been attractive to some, its lack helps explain the mobilisation of those new to the groups who did not identify themselves with activism, political, or environmental action.

### **The role of community**

Across all groups, the common aim and shared benefit was explained by use of the word ‘community’. It was cited frequently in explanations of motivations as described in 4.1, though was rarely spontaneously explained in any detail. I therefore asked participants to explain what they understood ‘community’ to signify, in follow up questions, if they had mentioned it in their explanation of their motivations.

There was a sense, from some responses (the tone and body language), that the meaning was self-evident; ‘here’, ‘all of us’, and therefore they were involved in community action due to its communal benefit and inclusivity for all. Chris, from the Energy group and active in his local residents’ association, explained in more detail:

It means the people next door. I mean you can define it in all kinds of

geographical boundaries or shared interests and so on but basically I think the idea of community is working with your neighbours and getting to know them because, and particularly if they are of diverse backgrounds, then if you can get that to cohere you've got a wonderful spirit out of it (...) That's my idea of a community, is a group of neighbours. (06.04.12)

That spirit was the basis of his involvement in community-led action. This sense of knowing their neighbours in a shared locale was the basis for most definitions of 'community' and entwined into why they participated in groups. There was community's benefit and action was a means of creating a sense of community with those also from shared geographies and self-selected to have shared interests.

Most of the participants were raised in the UK, and so Linda (an American who moved here later in life) provided an interesting perspective. I asked her what community meant to her and reflected on what community meant specifically here in the UK:

The British have a sense of how community should behave. And they leave it unspoken, which is the best thing to do as then you can censure people without being specific. Without pointing fingers, you can go 'cough, cough, cough'. Community by way of keeping people under some kind of influence without being specific about it. It can be really annoying as well. (12.04.12)

This was an interesting reflection on the power of community. In 1.2, I discussed how 'community' had been co-opted in policy as a means fulfilling sustainability-related targets. Linda highlighted the same point, but from the perspective of the community itself, namely as a self-management tool. It was also powerful for groups; a rallying cry to members and potential members. As Linda explained, it also signals how we should behave and, for these groups, this includes their inclusivity of the wider community.

The demand of inclusivity, I argue, is co-constitutive of the culture of the groups and their focus on practice change, non-party-political action and discourse, and the framing of involvement in action-oriented terms. These come together to contribute to creating a welcoming and neutral platform for those new to community-led and/or environmental or civic action. The cultures and reputations of the groups are more associated with their practice-experiments and their structure, management, and leadership practices, as will be explored in chapter 7.

The Transition Movement was criticised for being apolitical (Chatterton and Cutler 2008) and therefore likely to be ineffectual (North 2009). However, I agree with

Hopkins (2010) and argue that the apolitical nature of the groups included in this study is precisely their strength; both in expanding participation, and for holding together a borough-wide network of groups engaged in different sustainability-related activities. In addition, these groups play an important role alongside other kinds of environmental action. As the discussion in biographies identified, there are those who see themselves as activists — the radical habitus identified by Crossley (2002) and Haluza-DeLay (2008). However, this ‘radical’ nature is not, and does not need to be, expressed in all performances of environmental action. Group participants are frequently engaged in a repertoire of action — across groups, organisations, and other kinds of civic action.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on the individual and their motivations and journeys to participation, addressing how and why they are participating in grassroots sustainability groups. When reflecting on motivations, participants identified the centrality of an initial ‘match’ with the group: a shared sustainability-related concern at a variety of temporal and spatial scales. Adding nuance to current understandings of motivations in groups, the participants described multiple motivations, ranging across personal and communal benefits, and the need for enjoyment, belonging, and building social connections with ‘like-minded’ people. They needed a deeper ‘fit’ with the groups to enrol, commit, and remain involved. This corresponds with Klandermans’ (2007) understanding of why social movement participation appeals: through instrumentality, identity and ideology, and how practice performance shifts motivations over time (Røpke 2009, Hards 2011, Shove et al. 2012).

As groups concerned with practice change, they provided a range of opportunities to satisfy individuals’ motivations through learning, teaching, contributing skills and resources, and having fun. The opportunities were varied with an essential sense of progression and change. Motivations and opportunities were co-constitutive, thus aims, environmental concerns, interests, knowledge, and enthusiasm all shifted, alongside environmental values, during mobilisation (Hards 2011). Elements of experimentation, (relative) alterity, novelty, education (both given and received), and competition were embedded in the motivations and their shifts. Communal benefits in particular became more significant as participation developed. By asking participants about their immediate reasons for attending an activity, this discussion contributes temporal nuance



and understanding of the need for day-to-day motivations to be fulfilled, the need to feel immediate progress, sensorial and social benefit alongside the longer-term objectives. By asking about biographies, this discussion contributes understanding of longer journeys of participation, with participants' habitus influenced both by radical and more mundane experiences, and practice-competences from multiple fields (Crossley 2002, Haluza-DeLay 2008, Shove et al. 2012).

At one scale, the groups were similar in the essential ingredients that attract participants, which included both old hands and those new to community action and/or environmentalism. The groups were all driven by practice change and progress, both at the individual practitioner and group-as-practitioner scale. The groups were acting in the community, led by the community, for the benefit of the community; which demands inclusivity. The groups' apolitical nature, the deliberately neutral discourse of 'community', and of members and volunteers rather than activists, set the tone of being welcome to all. This commonality across the groups, a shared repertoire of contention discussed by Crossley (2002), also ensured they were able to work together in the Borough Network and become involved in inter-group and council collaborations. Inter-group networks and shared memberships also explained the connections between groups: of people and resources. Further exploration of participants' multiple memberships of groups, and involvement in other environmental and community activism identified a repertoire of action; further highlighting the role of these practice-change-oriented groups amongst other spaces of contention where activist habitus was co-performed (Crossley 2002, Shove et al. 2012, Martin 2013).

At a more detailed scale there were considerable differences between the groups. Participants explained the attraction of each group and their activities, its spaces of action, reputation, logistical issues, culture, and how it enacts sociality. They highlighted the importance of bodily performance of practices, and effects on emotions and senses (Aminzade and McAdam 2002, Brown and Pickerill 2009, Shove et al. 2012). These are explored further through the practice lens in subsequent chapters. The differences between groups were also imagined and a feature of othering; with assumptions about what action should include, and preconceptions of what different kinds of actions say about those involved. These are explained through habitus, shared repertoires (in activist and professional fields), and discursive attraction to particular kinds of action (Crossley 2002).

This exploration of motivations through the practice lens and understanding of social movements builds our understanding of these groups. They perform a particular kind of environmentalism: the mobilisation of practice-change-oriented aims and activities, communally performed, and inclusive, which encourages the mobilisation of both the experienced, and those new to community-led action. This builds on the understanding of participant motivations from the Grassroots Innovations literature (for example, Seyfang et al. 2010a,b), Transition Movement (for example, Hopkins 2008a,b, Haxeltine and Seyfang 2009, North 2009) and community renewable energy (for example, Walker 2008, Warren and McFayden 2010). The exploration and cross-group comparison highlighted particular practices for further exploration. Practices that encourage initial mobilisation such as introductions through social networks and sharing food, which build social connections in the group, as well as the practices which enabled them to learn, work, relax, and communicate. These are explored in more detail next in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

## Chapter 5 Stages of mobilisation

In this chapter, **Stages of mobilisation**, I explore the temporality of individual mobilisation in grassroots sustainability groups. I primarily address the first and second research questions: **how and why are people participating in grassroots sustainability groups?** and **what are the groups' practices of mobilisation?**

In the previous chapter, I discussed multiple motivations for participation and the inclusive environmentalism of the practice-change-oriented groups. I explored the shifts in motivations associated with practice performance and biographies of activism, and their long- and short-term effects on mobilisation. Here, I delve into the temporality of mobilisation by examining how participation and practices of mobilisation change over time, as groups endeavour to attract, retain, and increase involvement. During my mobilisation journey and in discussions with others, I noticed a longitudinal shift in how I was involved, the impacts of involvement, and my emotional connection to the groups. The cross-group comparison of participants' experiences, the practice lens, and the ethnographic approach helped me identify four common stages of participation: engagement, enrolment, involvement, and exit.

As discussed in 2.1, grassroots sustainability groups are typically conceived in a homogenous manner, both spatially and temporally. Individual types of groups are grouped together and are assumed to be static entities. This understanding is also a consequence of the focus on their effects and benefits, and the non-ethnographic methods used to research them (see 1.2). McAdam and Sewell Jr (2001) explain that studies of social movements often ignore temporalities. They add two temporalities — transformative events and cultural epochs of contention — to the usual focus on 'long-term change processes or protest cycles'<sup>17</sup> (ibid.:90). However, these are movement-level temporalities, as are the formation, awareness raising, institutionalisation, and demise stages of movements (see, for example, Della Porta and Diani 2006). Group-level stages of development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman and Jensen 1977) (which featured in the Transition group development training course I attended) are identified by organisational studies. Social movement explorations rarely delve into the temporalities of individual mobilisation. In a rare focus on the individual, Klandermans (2007) brings motivations into view (discussed in

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<sup>17</sup> A 'medium-term temporal rhythm' (ibid.:112)

chapter 4) and identifies three stages of engagement in social movements: initial engagement, sustained participation, and disengagement (1997).

My four stages of participation of individuals in the mobilisation of grassroots sustainability groups were identified through the distinct recognisable practices-as-entity performed at each stage across the groups, and are described in this chapter (Schatzki 1996, Shove et al. 2012). I add more nuance, via practices, to understanding the stages of participation, and, in particular, forms of exit. Understanding individual temporalities is also important in broader explanations of how groups perform mobilisation over time. I continue to relate this to the dating analogy. Engagement is the introduction: the ‘match’ where the individual and group initially find attraction. Enrolment occurs when the deeper ‘fit’ and attachment is established. Involvement is the growing and deepening relationship where each ‘date’ must satisfy the mix of motivations to ensure the relationship endures. Exit occurs when the relationship falters in some way, and the participant departs. Groups ultimately endeavour to attract newcomers and move them along the stages to deeper involvement. I identify the practices that are crucial in encouraging mobilisation at each stage, and those that hinder this progression.

As described in chapter 3, the materials presented here derive from 25 interviews with group participants and a multitude of informal discussions during the ethnography (see Appendix 3). My involvement and participant observation contributed further findings, as did ongoing interactions with the groups after fieldwork to the present day. My identification of the stages is a result of a cumulative analysis across the groups, of individuals at different stages, observations and discussions with those moving through stages, and insights from interviewees’ journeys. The stages are not rigid, and movement (or lack thereof) through them varies for each participant. However, they are helpful, as an idealised description, for understanding mobilisation and the commonalities and differences in practice performance across the groups.

### **Structure of the chapter**

Engagement, 5.1, occurs when participants’ motivations reach a tipping point, leading to first contact with an existing group. I explore the various practices of engagement through social connections, mediated communications, and experiential interactions.

Enrolment, 5.2, occurs when a commitment is made to the group. I examine how

participants get to know the group and connect with it, the opportunities the group provides, the effects of reputation, and practical issues of access and commitment. I discuss the challenges of moving newcomers from enrolment to a deeper level of involvement.

Involvement, 5.3, is the day-to-day participation in the group's activities. I describe the multiple ways of being involved and how involvement deepens over time. I discuss the growing emotional attachments and sense of belonging, and the practices performed to support this attachment. I examine the challenges of a lack of capacity of members and groups, and the finding of ways to maintain and increase participants' levels of participation, both physically and virtually.

Exit, 5.4, occurs when involvement wanes. I identify the factors that can lead an individual to leave a group. I discuss how exit can happen to different extents, with connections to groups lingering in space and time.

## **5.1 Engagement**

The first engagement cultivated a desire to return as the group appeared attractive and a candidate for fulfilling their motivations for community action. As is explained in 5.4, the match was not always found and they did not return. There was considerable similarity across the groups, with two processes converging. Participants explained a gradual shift in their motivations and identified a serendipitous introduction to the group resulting in the engagement. Motivations were discussed in chapter 4. Here I concentrate on the practices involved in the introductions. Whilst some participants actively sought out the group, more commonly the means of engagement was not as direct: through group visibility and experiential engagement practices, through social introductions, and encouraged by mediated communications, discussed in turn.

### **Group visibility and experiential engagement**

By their nature of being community-based, each group created a degree of local visibility through their effects on the physical environment. In addition, visibility was achieved by design, through stalls and other experiential engagement activities. Some efforts were group-only endeavours and some were collaborations with others.

For the Nurture and Urban Food groups, there was flourishing green space, visible to passers-by. The Energy groups' installation of solar PV on local roofs also created a material impact, however, these were mainly invisible to the untrained eye. For the Foraging group, the visibility came from encounters with other users of public space during the foraging walks, with people sometimes stopping and listening in. For the Transition and the Energy groups, the visibility was primarily through the public events and therefore dependent on practices to drive audience attendance.

Stalls had great success at engaging passers-by at public events (see Figure 7 in 6.1). They had the benefit of reaching wider publics, displaying branding and encouraging people to find out more. Stalls gave the potential newcomer a flavour of the group, through the opportunity to understand, and often experience, the learning practices related to the group, and through interaction with those manning the stall. Those involved explained that these activities were also resource-heavy in terms of person-power, materials, and transportation, and they considered them carefully before agreeing to undertake them, despite their acknowledged success. I visited the Energy group, Borough Network, and Transition group stalls at community events, with some dedicated to green issues. I also volunteered on the campaigning stall of the Energy group on the local high street (discussed in 4.3). Each format was slightly different and had differing effects.

The stalls at community fairs were opportunities to engage with the wider public (and potential newcomers) in a relaxed manner; the stall was within a broader community event, and people drawn to the stall were self-selecting and interested in finding out more information. The stalls included flyers, activities and things to touch, such as draught-proofing and water saving measures on the Energy stall, and bikes, cob, and food at the Transition Festival. People often lingered, perusing the stall, handling the materials and asking questions, which gave those manning the stall the opportunity to explain the group's learning opportunities and projects. The Energy group successfully recruited paid members. Those manning the stalls reported they were hard work, but that they were successful at driving general awareness, and at bringing newcomers to events (IDs). The Energy group's campaigning stall was a different experience for both potential newcomers and those manning it, as it was more disruptive in its location and activities (as discussed in 4.3). It was not known how many subsequently enrolled with the group as a result of the engagement, but there was considerable success in the primary aim of gathering petition signatures.

The Foraging group provided food, soft drinks, and cocktails made from locally-foraged ingredients at community events. This sensorial engagement had several positive effects. I noted how many people the tasting opportunity attracted and the surprise it engendered, as they learned how nice the concoctions tasted and about the ingredients' provenance. Tasting generated enthusiastic discussions with other attendees, and created opportunities for the group to explain how their activities could support newcomers to learn how to forage for themselves. There was a cultural aspect too; one participant noted the cocktail tasting had given them a great impression of the group, which 'seemed like it would be a lot of fun!' (ID). Amy, a leader of the group, was driven by her passion for experimentation and her belief that tasting was vital in passing on her enthusiasm; which she succeeded in during these encounters. I watched several people pick up details of the group or note down details on their phones, and later noticed several familiar faces at foraging events. The success of this experiential engagement meant that Amy's cocktails were frequently suggested to be included during event planning meetings of neighbouring groups and the Borough Network.

Collaborations also helped drive visibility. The Low Carbon Zone (LCZ), discussed further in 7.5, created considerable engagement with residents via door-knocking about the Council/Energy group offer to make material changes in the home, and with communications, such as flyers and the 'In the Zone' newsletter (Figure 4). I met several Energy group newcomers who had first met the group through the LCZ, found out more about the group's other activities, and subsequently attended a group-led event or activity (IDs).

There were additional forms of experience-led contact that occurred within the project spaces. The Nurture group held community open days, and the Urban Food group conducted paid-for training sessions. Each of these gave newcomers an insight into the day-to-day activities of the group and how future participation would benefit them.

### **Introductions through social networks**

Social connections were frequently implicated in how participants found out about the groups, often attending with a friend or acquaintance. This was often in conjunction with an invitation to an event shared via social media or email. I asked about who the 'friends' were; they tended to be those made locally through being neighbours or having other shared interests (IDs). This resonated with my experience of living in the area; my

lifelong friends live elsewhere, but I had a network of newer friendships rooted in our shared geography. Members also explained how they were introduced to another group by a friend who was a shared member (Interviews and IDs).

I asked how this process occurred. They explained that they trusted their friends, that they correctly understood what they would enjoy, and therefore that the recommended group (or new group) would be interesting to explore (IDs). There was an influential discursive element. The call-to-action of invitations were primarily centred on doing a fun activity or learning a particular practice. Newcomers explained that they wanted to 'try it out', 'find out more', and 'it sounded like fun' (IDs). The invitations to engage were not associated with a broader sustainability concern, or persuasion to join a campaign or political effort. They were action-oriented, immediate, and considered to be neutral discursive ground from which the newcomers could find out more.

The importance of social connections was also evident to recruiters in the groups, many of who also explained their role during their own initial engagement. These recruiters acted as conduits of information, inviting initial attendance at an event or project, and then encouraging individuals to enrol in the group and commit further. These were not official tasks or roles, but rather the actions of skilled practitioners, who were aware of the importance of this networking in securing ongoing participation. The most evident example was the 'Chris Effect'. Chris was secretary of the Energy group, door-knocker in the LCZ project and active in the residents' association. Many Energy group members described how he had a significant hand in their engagement and subsequent enrolment. They explained that he had a very persuasive, friendly manner, and was trusted and active in the community. Chris became a key research co-practitioner, introducing me to group activities and to other members. Similarly, other individuals who helped me through extensive chats and introductions were often names that were mentioned in stories of social introductions. They were vested in the groups and wanted to promote them, and were also amiable characters. These qualities were essential in building the group membership through introductions, and ensuring the groups felt welcoming for the newcomers.

Whilst the groups performed little measurement or analysis of the different forms of engagement, my research established that social connections were crucial. The role was twofold; as a means of bringing newcomers to the events and projects, and as a distribution channel of mediated communications. This was particularly important given



the groups' limited resources for marketing.

### Encouraging engagement through mediated communications

To drive awareness of activities and encourage newcomers to engage, each group carried out mediated communications. The messages briefly highlighted the group's core concern, mainly focusing on forthcoming events. Longer-form communications included an update on the group's projects and progress, provided a flavour of the activities that the reader could participate in, and the practice change and progress-oriented nature of the groups. Multiple formats were used, including printed materials (posters, leaflets, and flyers) and digital formats (websites, social media, and email). Table 2 illustrates the mix of channels used by each group.

**Table 2: Mix of communications formats used by each group.**

		Energy	Nurture	Transition	Urban Food	Foraging	Borough Network
Digital	Group website		(Ning only)				
	Email update / e-newsletter					Listserv	Listserv
	Facebook						
	Twitter						
Printed	Posters						
	Leaflets through letterboxes						
	Leaflets, flyers on stalls						
External	Via other groups'/networks' email or e-newsletter						
	Via other groups'/networks' website	Project Dirt		Transition Network, Project Dirt	Project Dirt		

As illustrated, each group drove engagement through a different combination of printed and digital mediated-communication. Participants, at different stages, mentioned these formats in their explanations of how they had first engaged with the group, with particular emphasis on digital, though they were often unspecific as to which form.

Posters publicised talks, film nights, workshops, and volunteer days and were posted locally, typically one to two weeks before the event. They were used to drive short-term attendance, and their placement in the local environment, at particular times, reflecting the rhythms of the group's activities, created a spatial-temporal pattern which contributed to building the story of the group's territory of action.

Posters were a means of reaching a wide range of potential newcomers. It was hoped by the groups that those living locally might already be interested in community issues and therefore extend their concerns to local sustainability action (IDs). Locations included perspex-covered community notice boards, public spaces that had become an informal site for posting local notices, and in proximity to project spaces, or venues that had hosted, or were due to host, events. Talking to participants at events established that posters were an effective means of attracting the attendance of the constituency of that venue (IDs). Being inserted into the wider environment did not mean posters were necessarily noticed, as they are competing for attention with other messages and brands (Figure 4). Such places often contained a multitude of other posters for passers-by to scan, and groups would therefore spend time thinking about how their poster might stand out. The focus on event invitations seemed to be effective; with a date and speaker topic or activity forming headlines to grab attention (Figure 4).

**Issue 8**

**IN THE ZONE**



**Spring 2012**

**HEADING FOR THE LAST ROUND-UP**

At last the Zone Ranger has found a low carbon vehicle, for getting about town. He has rounded up a whole herd and is driving them up to Muswell Hill Broadway for **Saturday 31st March 2012**. This is when the shops in N10 are going green and putting on festive entertainment and offering specially discounted green merchandise. These man-powered cycle rickshaws will help you do the rounds. The LCZ will also be celebrating the many achievements to date with an info display outside the Crocodile Café plus music, freebies, and an interactive low-carbon info stall by the Muswell Hill Sustainability Group. We will be having an awards ceremony at 3.30pm to thank all those that have made the project a success.



**LOW CARBON ZONE CELEBRATION EVENT: Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> March**  
**Awards ceremony at 4.30pm downstairs in the Crocodile Café with entertainment from our local Hillfield choir and special guest appearance by Fiona McKinnon, BBC newscaster and interviewer.**

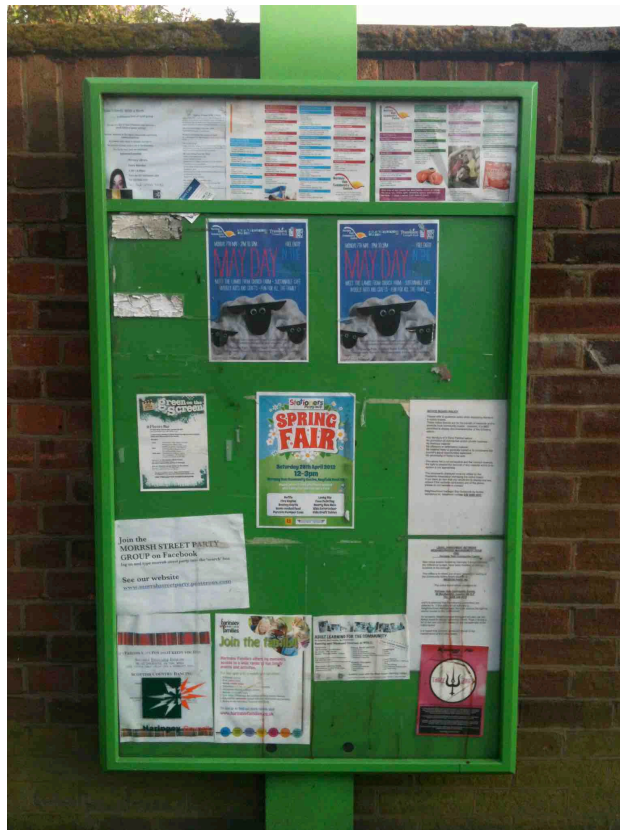
**Come along to see the information display outside the café all day with info on low-carbon living, freebies, activities, and prizes.**

IN THE ZONE logo design: Joy Wheeler

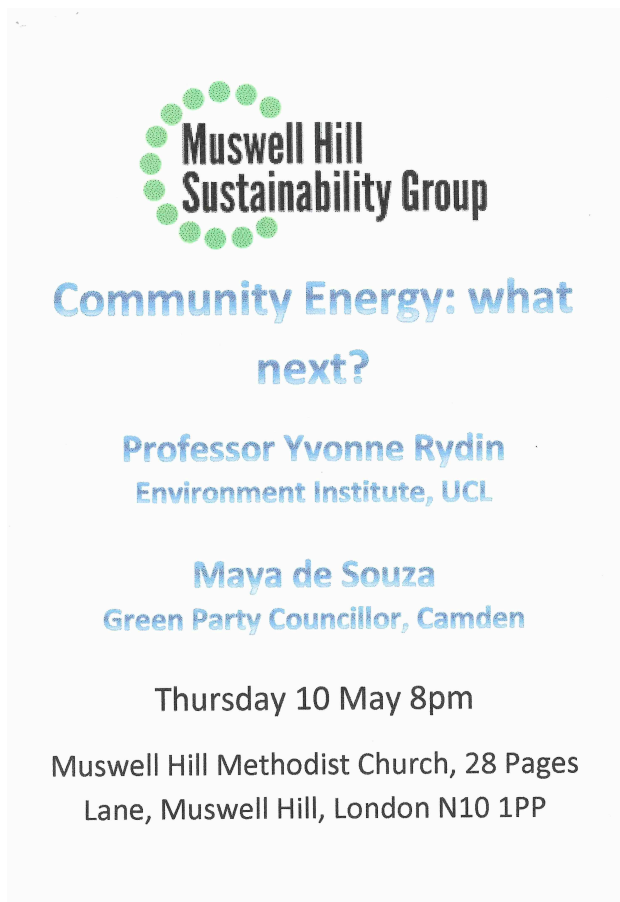
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**MUSWELL HILL**  
**LOW CARBON ZONE**

### In the Zone newsletter



**Community noticeboard**



**Energy group speaker event poster**



### Foraging group events flyer

**Figure 4: In the Zone newsletter, community noticeboard, Energy group speaker event poster, and Foraging group calendar of events flyer.**

Some groups printed flyers for events (Figure 4). The Energy group also printed leaflets containing more detailed group information and practical advice on making changes to the home. They were handed out on the stalls and occasionally posted through letterboxes of homes, if volunteers could be found to distribute them. These longer-form formats offered a way for potential newcomers to engage with the group on their own terms; choosing to pick up and peruse further at a time of their choice and, it was hoped, giving it their full attention. Several recipients highlighted their benefit in that they had greater longevity than other formats, lingering in the home as reference material for enacting DIY measures (Charles, Joseph, and Susan). Recipients praised them for containing locally-relevant information that tackled common issues, such as draughty windows in the area's old housing stock (IDs). They helped create the expert reputation of the group in home energy matters and a positive first impression.

Promotion of the group through their networks played a crucial role. All the groups shared invitations to events and news with other groups and networks, with the intention that they would be distributed onwards via digital communications. The groups shared updates with each other and through the Borough Network, which sent out network updates including constituent group news. The Energy group shared their news with their collaborators, such as the local Methodist church and Haringey Council. Several groups used Project Dirt; a social networking platform connecting community projects involved in sustainability. Depending on users' preferences, email updates were regularly received about forthcoming local events. The benefit of this approach was that they were shared to existing self-selected, topic-interested (community, sustainability or both) audiences, and through a source trusted by the reader. Sharing increased the potential for engaging with a larger group of local people, and these external groups helped with the 'heavy lifting' and amplification of the groups' voices. It also contributed to the stating of, and spreading of, the territory of the groups' activities, and helped build a sense of a healthy network of community action across the groups. It spread the word and made each group appear embedded in a larger mobilisation.

Group websites were the first encounter for those who actively searched out the group (Figure 5). In informal discussions, participants explained that they engaged in background research online before attending events. Several highlighted this practice for the Transition group, with one explaining: 'I knew about Transition Towns and found the group nearest to me' (ID). Using the website facilitated further contact. Each group had a website accessible via natural listings on search engines, live links in digital communications, and the domain name in printed materials. Core group members assumed website visitors to be active readers and therefore receptive to reading information about the group. However, there were no analytics on visitor numbers or page views available.



# The Sustainable Haringey Network News

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

Many thanks to all those who helped make the Gathering on 1st April a success - especially parishioners at St John Vianney church who are following the Live Simply programme (looking at living more sustainably and in solidarity with the poor). An excellent afternoon and a chance to exchange ideas and plot new campaigns.

One thing that came out of the meeting (suggested by Helen Steel) is that SH should write a letter to Thames Water expressing its concern about how food growers on allotments and in private gardens are being penalised by the hose pipe ban, whereas commercial water users such as car washes and golf courses are not. I am in the process of drafting a letter - any comments welcome please.

Posted by Pamela Harling 0 comments

Monday, 12 March 2012

As part of the Council's 40:20 campaign and following Muswell Hill's 100 homes project, the campaign is now recruiting households who would like to monitor their energy use and look at ways to reduce it. A part time coordinator will be contacting those interested (details to follow shortly). In particular, the campaign is hoping to recruit households in the ladder, Crouch End, Noel Park and Bowes Park.

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**Sustainable Haringey Network**

**Link to your social networks!**

This blog is updated with meetings and events carried out by people associated with the Sustainable Haringey Network. Please visit our [web site](#) for our mission statement and lots of information! [Join our Facebook Group!](#)

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**Wood chips available at St James Viaduct**

April 3rd, 2012, in News, by Carajenkinson3

Low carbon zone nears completion Low Carbon awards for Alan and Kate Recycle those bins!

Wood chips available at St James Viaduct Are you spending £100 per year on kitchen lighting?

**Low carbon zone nears completion**

Muswell Hill Traders gave us an exciting Green Day on 31 March 2012. Up and down the Broadway there were musicians, go-go dancers, conjurors and jugglers. And rickshaws did the rounds, carrying customers round the shops to buy discounted green merchandise. Tucked away in the Crocodile Café was a Green Grotto where the MHSG had ... Continue Reading

April 8th, 2012, in Campaigns, Energy, by Jeremy

**Low carbon awards for Alan and Kate**

There was prize giving in the Green Grotto on 31 March 2012 and inevitably Alan Morton, our Prime Mover of the Low Carbon Zone and other sustainability projects in Muswell Hill, was up for an Oscar. He outlined MHSG's plans for extending our 100 homes project into other neighbourhoods (Bounds Green, the Harringay Ladder, Crouch ... Continue Reading

April 8th, 2012, in Campaigns, Energy, Haringey, by Jeremy

**Muswell Hill Sustainability Group Events**

Today Wednesday, April 11, 2012

Monday, April 16, 2012

8:00pm Sustainable Food and Farm

Showing events until 10/15. [Look for more](#)

Events shown in time zone: London. Add to Google Calendar

See our events page for more.

Popular Recent Comments

**No to Biodegradable Plastic Bags**

3 Comments

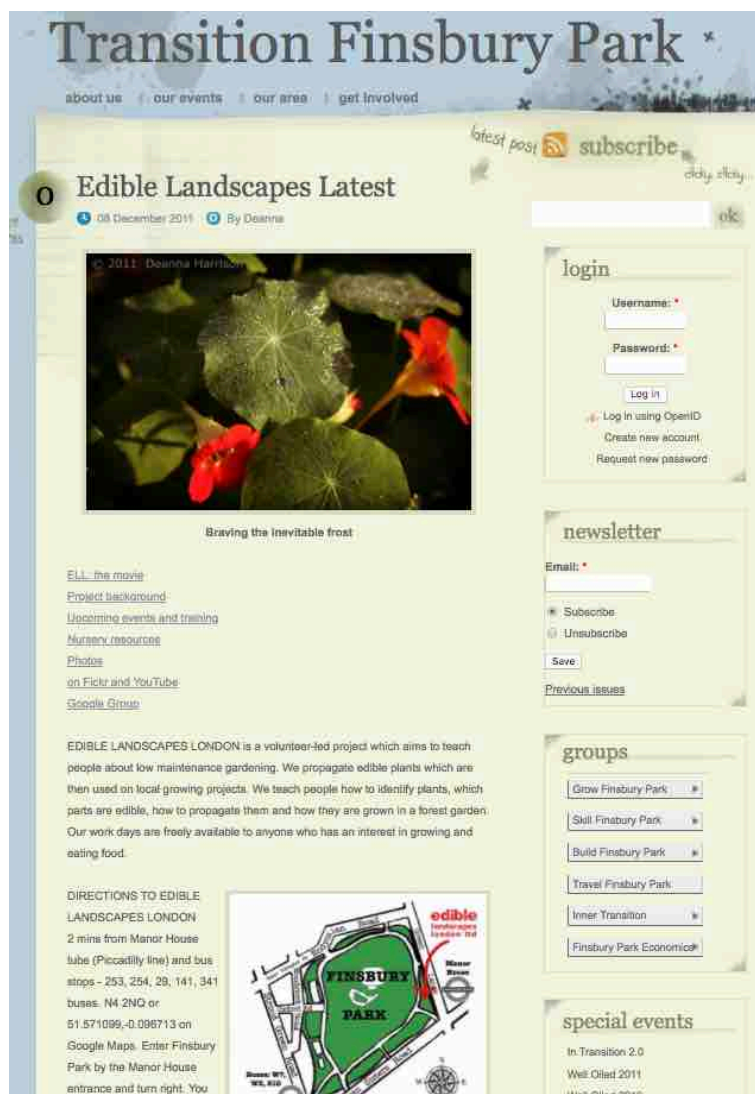
**Low Carbon Com**

Muswell Hill Sustainability Group supports Haringey Council in successful bid to DECC for the Low Carbon Communities Fund.

3 Comments

**Low Carbon Buying Group launched**

## Energy group web page



**Transition group web page**

**Figure 5: Examples of group websites - Borough Network, Energy group and Transition group.**

The websites provided a clear statement of the aims and history of the group, in contrast to the differing verbal stories received from individuals when the engagement was made through other means. Websites varied in content and functionality. This reflected both the resources available and the complexity of the groups' aims. Sites typically contained a combination of group stories, news, and invitations. The Energy group website also held considerable reference material, providing detailed information on sustainability topics and self-help guides. Susan explained: 'I was impressed by the useful information on the website — they even had some recommendations for local people to do work. I mean, actually recommended by people in the group'. I asked her for more explanation as to why this was useful and she explained: 'Usually such information is so generic it's not that useful — but here... I'm not putting panels up just yet, but here is some really useful information for when I need it' (11.04.12). The ready availability of expert

information affected impressions and built the territory of action claimed by the group. It continued to be useful during participation. Over the course of the fieldwork period, participants (from engagement through to involvement) increasingly mentioned digital communication, as social media usage became more prevalent in the groups. At the engagement stage, newcomers saw digital communication as their social networks forwarded it to them. Some also noted postings about events in local Facebook groups and their Twitter networks (IDs), and in e-newsletters sent by other community groups. As highlighted earlier, these mediated communications were reliant on social connections for their distribution.

### **Understanding engagement**

Participants engaged with the group through social introductions, experiential engagement, and mediated communications. Social networks were crucial, as identified in a great deal of social movement literature, with Klandermans (1997) giving particular attention to their role in recruitment. The practice lens draws attention to the mechanisms by which newcomers were reached and brought along to events by social networks, and networks as a distribution channel of the groups' mediated communications. Despite the differences in the groups' activities, the engagement practices-as-entity were similar in both discursive focus and medium, which drew attention to their practice-change- and progress-oriented focus. This was the case even within the experiential forms, where all groups who used them successfully managed to create a material experience through one aspect of their activities. This corresponds with the means of engagement described by Klandermans (1997), though with additional focus on experiential activities which, given the practice-change orientation of this form of mobilisation, was an effective means of engaging with potential newcomers. They gave great insight, through their sensorial aspects, into the practices to be co-performed on joining the group, their benefits, and their fun nature. There was a combination of novel practices to co-perform with the group alongside dispersed practices that were familiar from other fields (Schatzki 1996, Crossley 2002, Shove et al. 2012). Thus joining a group was attractive as they gave a flavour (in communication) or demonstrated (in experiential activities) several positive aspects during engagement: practice-change and supported learning, novel and familiar practices, and frequently an existing (real or virtual) social connection.



## 5.2 Enrolment

Here I explore enrolment, the stage when a participant returns to the group after their initial engagement. Whilst there were those did not return (discussed in 5.4), most of those I spoke with enrolled in some way. There needed to be an interpersonal click and an emotional connection with the people and culture. I enjoyed field trips to projects around the borough, and I was struck by the importance of leaving them feeling keen to return. As mentioned in 3.3, one group leader asked candidly: ‘Do you like us enough to come back?’ (Joe). Mine was an emotional response reflecting on whether I had enjoyed myself, fitted in, and felt inspired to return. Enrolment was greatly encouraged by these social factors; the interpersonal experiences during initial face-to-face group encounters, as well as the ongoing influence of social connections. Participants evaluated what the group was offering. They explained the importance of more emotive factors, such as the group culture and reputation, and finding a role within the group. I discuss each of these in turn.

### **What's on offer?**

Newcomers evaluated whether the activities on offer would support them to fulfil their multiple motivations. Through investigating the groups’ activities and listening to what participants assessed, I identified the other key factors. Table 3 illustrates the details of the groups’ offerings, expanding on the introduction to groups’ activities provided in Table 1 in 3.3.

**Table 3: Comparison of the groups' offerings.**

	<b>Energy</b>	<b>Nurture</b>	<b>Transition</b>	<b>Urban Food</b>	<b>Foraging</b>	<b>Borough Network</b>
<b>Main activities</b>	Speaker events, workshops	Volunteer day	Volunteers for project activities and events (see Urban Food)	Volunteer day	Seasonal walks / inside events	Monthly gatherings. Most activity online. Specialist field trips
<b>Topics</b>	Topical talks. Draught proofing workshops. Topical campaigning stalls	Seasonal local food and celebrations	Project related: transport, recycling, growing	Seasonal local food	Seasonal local food	Driven by groups concerns, updates, campaigns with/on council
<b>Social time</b>	AGMs/Socials shared food/drink. Speaker events post Q&A	Shared lunch	Varied	Shared lunch, included project ingredients	Shared lunch, included topical recipes	Shared potluck
<b>Project space</b>	Various local venues	Single project space	No central space. Activity dependent	Single project space	Public space (unless gardens, by arrangement)	Rotated venues around borough
<b>Timing</b>	Event & workshops - evening, stalls - daytime weekend	Volunteer day, week & weekend	Varied, project related	Volunteer day, during week	2-3 hours, weekend daytime. Picking sessions ad-hoc	Gatherings weekend daytime
<b>Regularity</b>	Ad-hoc	Weekly	Projects varied	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly Gatherings
<b>Requirements for attendance</b>	Events scheduled, timing fixed	Volunteers come and go, some choice in activities	Events scheduled	Volunteers come and go, some choice in activities	Events scheduled	Events scheduled
<b>Membership</b>	Paid membership (required for workshops/buying group)	Informal	Informal	Informal	Informal	Informal
<b>Contact with members</b>	e-newsletters	Invitations sent to email list	Invitations sent to email list	Invitations sent to email list, social media invitations	Network self managed via listserv	Discussions on 'Activists list' listserv
<b>Other activities offered</b>		Well-being & community events		Paid for training courses		

As shown in Table 3, the factors affecting their subsequent enrolment included the main activities; the topics covered, the opportunities for social time, project space and access, timing and regularity of activities, the requirements for commitment, and additional attractive offerings. These affected who wished to, and could, attend. Proximity and access to the project space became more crucial as the logistics of regular attendance became apparent. Most attendees were local and would walk or take a short bus ride to attend.

Across the groups, many cited the benefit of the multiple opportunities the groups offered to get involved. As Ben, involved in the Nurture and Transition groups, highlighted, 'there is always something new or interesting to do' (ID). This matched the multiple motivations of the participants. This relationship was co-constitutive; with demand and supply affecting each other. Many participants highlighted how they enjoyed the hands-on nature of the activity. For example, Lucy explained that: 'Here you get your hands dirty. We've got building, gardening, bees, yoga, performances, all sorts. Everyone can find something they want to do' (ID). This highlighted both the practice change focus and the attractive multiplicity of what was on offer. Newcomers frequently referred to the innovative and action-oriented practices they could perform. In follow-up discussions, the future potential of involvement was also acknowledged, particularly for the Energy group, which created a sense of excitement in getting more involved, and resulted in the shifting motivations during participation discussed in 4.2. Some participants also compared this form of experiential environmentalism to other forms that required less bodily endeavour and effort. Clicktivism was cited by a couple of participants, and differences in action with organisations such as Greenpeace and the local Green party mentioned by others (IDs).

At this enrolment stage, the newcomer needed to experience the varied group practices and, where they were less immediately apparent, they needed to be informed about the less visible aspects of the group's efforts. The practices involved in face-to-face encounters are described in greater depth in chapter 6; here I highlight how showcasing the group was performed. The Nurture and Urban food groups were characterised by physical labour, being outside, and sharing food, which incorporated some ingredients from the space. During social time, the group discussed the tasks that needed doing and the longer-term plans. For the Nurture group, there was also a well-being aspect and, if one came on a cob-building volunteering day, involvement in the construction of the community building. There were always several tasks to be done and experts willing to give advice. The Foraging group's walks typically consisted of identifying plants, learning how to gather, sharing food, and discussing recipes and what would next be in season, similarly with expert advice available. For the Energy group, speaker events began with an introduction from the chair about the group and projects, followed by the speaker and a question and answer session, and increasingly followed by social time for discussion.

At a basic level, this meant that participants were more likely to find something within their time with the group that was interesting, useful, and fun, or hear about further future opportunities which encouraged them to return. The groups knew what worked. The Energy group increasingly put a focus on socialising over the year; including more time for informal discussions after the speakers, highlighting this within communications. Louise explained that 'energy isn't sexy, [that] we have to find ways to get people to chat' (ID). She had seen how the shared food at events, such as those of the Borough Network, encouraged people to relax and discuss issues more openly, and subsequently integrated the ritual within the group's practices.

When the practices to encourage enrolment worked well, I observed newcomers welcomed by someone gregarious. The group and project were explained, they were given a tour and the opportunity to try different tasks. They were encouraged to join in the shared social time and food, whether or not they had brought something along to contribute.

When they worked less well, I observed newcomers arrive, not be able to see whom to approach, and look lost or uncomfortable. They would struggle with the tasks without support, or slope away as the talk finished. These examples were in the minority but highlighted the common success factor; having someone to support their transition into the group. They would introduce the groups' aims, the projects and their successes, introduce other members, demonstrate activities, and help get them involved in discussions. This welcoming practice would help the newcomer establish whether they would fit into the group, from both an experiential and social perspective.

### **The effect of culture and reputation**

Participants described assessing the 'fit' with the group from an emotive and cultural perspective. Newcomers across the groups described common early impressions of the characteristics of the groups, such as being inclusive, fun, friendly, and open. As highlighted in 4.5, there were also differences in attributes with which the groups were associated; of their 'fluffy' or 'stuffy' nature, and the kind of environmental action in which they were involved. Newcomers tended to have an idea of the culture of the group from their initial engagement, which was then confirmed or amended during their early experiences. Debbie explained the factors that encouraged her enrolment:

I was attracted to [Energy] because they've been a very successful group at actually doing practical things on the ground, they're very well organised, they

have some very knowledgeable people, and through that I became secretary (...)

It is very exciting and very empowering and very positive to actually make a difference. (12.07.12)

Here she linked positive reputation, efficacy, and, as she discussed further in the interview, being able to contribute her professional managerial competence to the group. She identified a cultural and competence fit between herself and the group.

Participants from all the groups explained the appeal of a successful group. It helped them feel they were contributing to something worthwhile (IDs). For those with motivations linked to a time imperative or a wish to make lifestyle changes, demonstrable results were especially encouraging, particularly in the Energy, Urban Food, and Nurture groups. Diana had seen the LCZ project successes reported in the 'In the Zone' newsletter and the engagement had directly resulted in her attending the event where we met. We chatted afterwards and she explained her rationale: 'I wanted to be a part of that success, that's why I came to this talk' (ID). A positive sense of efficacy was common across groups, which means that stories of success are crucial in driving participation and, concomitantly, building a culture of success for the group. This in part explains the longevity of groups as a self-fulfilling prophecy: participants enjoy the group's successes and expect more of them, which in turn helps the group continue to succeed.

The references to reputation in our discussions were frequently associated with innovative actions. Reputation varied across the groups, and it was difficult to separate initial understandings of reputation from those developed through participation. The Energy group was described as being professional, expert, full of intelligent people, results driven, and well-funded. The Nurture group was associated with fun, as an escape in the city, and there was excitement about re-wilding, the innovative cob building, and community endeavour. The Transition and Urban Food groups were couched in terms around learning and training, innovative growing techniques (some referenced permaculture), and successfully growing food in the city. The Foraging group was construed as adventurous, with a deep expert understanding of seasons and nature, and, for some, a sense of acting against societal norms.

Whilst the groups had different reputations, they were all positive. The principal outcome was that there was a further match; between what the participants saw as 'successful', and what the group was achieving and demonstrating to them. This match

might appear a necessity for mobilisation. However, understanding the details of the groups' reputation and its role in encouraging further involvement can affect the way groups present themselves: through the stories they tell and how they welcome newcomers. For the groups, messages about positive results are crucial in driving participation and building a culture of success.

I asked Alex if he would return to the Nurture group. He agreed and went on: 'The tour was great, I got a real sense of what the project is about ... and next time hopefully the weather will be better' (ID). At the Energy meetings, core group members were always keen to share their success stories. Georgia recounted how inspirational that had been (ID). Foraging was less verbal and more sensorial. Anita jovially explained: 'How could you not want to come back, it tastes great!' (ID). As these explanations highlight, positive cultural associations were built very quickly, through initial co-performance in the groups' practices, creating a desire to return.

### **The importance of finding a role**

Finding a 'fit' was also predicated on finding an appropriate role. This requirement depended on the newcomers' motivations, and how the group encouraged them to become further involved. Here I discuss the role of the groups in matching up skills, needs, and opportunities, both in the more visible project practices and those behind the scenes.

Chris, of 'Chris Effect' fame, had a knack for encouraging people to commit to tasks for the Energy group. Chris's skills at this revealed a challenge, mentioned by participants and observed across the groups, namely that of finding roles for members that would help engender a sense of belonging, encouraging longer-term involvement. As highlighted earlier, groups with a physical location provided more significant opportunities for newcomers to experience the qualities of the project space, get their hands dirty, and socialise over food. The communal time was ideal for finding out more and asking questions. Such experiences made it easier to establish what kinds of tasks or roles they may wish to do. For example, Avril declared whilst chatting over lunch at the Nurture group:

Before I came, I had no idea they were building a community space from cob. I didn't even know what cob was! But jumping around in the mud was brilliant (...)

I'm not sure how I contributed but I'll happily do it again. (ID)

This gave the Nurture group an insight to her competence, resources, and enthusiasm

for future contributions to the group's endeavours.

For the Energy group, face-to-face interactions, such as expert-led talks, provided fewer opportunities for socialising and networking, and so conversations between newcomers and existing members were harder to have. Whilst the events included time for chatting, they were not as personal or lengthy as those over sit-down meals. Therefore, it was challenging for newcomers to establish their position, and for core group members to find out how they would like to become involved. There were occasions, however, when newcomers successfully found roles. Fortuitously, at the first meeting Debbie attended, the group requested volunteers for a new membership secretary. She was happy to oblige, as she wanted a role that could be fulfilled from home.

Later, participation in Transition group development training confirmed that this challenge was common and, despite the coaching on how to overcome it, few corrective practices had been successfully embedded (IDs). Two core group members explained in follow-up conversations that they had concluded that time and energy were so thinly spread on running projects, that group development efforts inevitably fell by the wayside (IDs). They expressed frustration, as they believed that effectively utilising participants would alleviate pressure on core members, help integrate newcomers into the group, and strengthen group culture long-term. I discuss this further in chapter 7 on leadership practices.

### **Becoming enrolled**

Having established the importance of the groups' offerings, the effects of culture and reputation, and finding a role, here I discuss the practice of becoming enrolled. Enrolment practice depended on the structure of the group. Most groups had informal memberships and, whilst the groups hoped newcomers would become regularly involved, there were no official requirements for commitment. This flexibility was compelling; participants were under no pressure during this enrolment stage and could see that they would be in control of their participation once they joined.

Some were keen to become involved and quickly committed significant time to regular attendance, and informal or formal roles. Some preferred a more irregular commitment. As Becca explained about her involvement in the Foraging group: 'I was looking for something quite casual. I knew they did something once a month and I could pop along on my bike and join somewhere along the walk' (ID). Some also identified with these

commitment levels in their personalities: 'I don't like making too many commitments' (Energy ID) versus 'I like to keep busy and get stuck in' (Transition ID). This implies a benefit to having multiple local groups, each with a range of opportunities available, enabling interested members to find a fit. The Energy group was the exception in that it had a formal membership with an annual fee of £10. Newcomers were encouraged to join online and set up an annual direct debit. The core group explained the benefits of financially supporting the group; getting access to the members-only activities, such as the DIY workshops and the bulk-buying group. All newcomers readily agreed to sign up during my observations.

Each group kept members updated on their activities through digital communications to maintain their relationship outside of the group's face-to-face encounters. At the enrolment stage, each group encouraged newcomers to sign up to the updates by joining the email list or following the group on social media. This digital enrolment was beneficial to the groups, as the updates served as a reminder for events, kept the relationship going with the newcomer before the next face-to-face encounter, and provided more detailed information on the wider range of activities and project progression. The tempo, style, and format of these communications also contributed to newcomer's understanding of the activities and culture of the group.

### **Understanding enrolment**

The initial participation in activities and the digital enrolment helped newcomers assess a deeper 'fit' with the group. Motivation to enrol resulted from experiencing and assessing what was on offer, accessibility, commitment required, what one would gain from it, and fit with the people; corresponding with Klandermans' (2007) triumvirate of practical, social, and emotive factors discussed in chapter 4. Therefore, by providing a range of activities, a supportive environment focused on practice change, and a flexible means of committing, the groups were maximising their attractiveness. Whilst each group's activities are unique, there were common practices-as-entity that helped enrolment when done well and hindered when done badly or omitted (Schatzki 1996, Shove et al. 2012). These practices were welcomes, explaining the proceedings and story of the group, the opportunities for involvement, asking about their skills and needs, and introductions to other members. These were all practices with which the newcomers were familiar with; with tacit knowledge and competence from co-performance of dispersed practices in other fields (Schatzki 1996, Crossley 2002, Shove et al. 2012). These made the transition into the group more relaxed and supported.



Participants all mentioned social interactions and practices, such as food sharing, which encouraged enrolment due to feelings of enjoyment and connection with others. I identified the benefit of understanding needs and finding roles for newcomers. However, such practices did not always occur as those with competence were not always in attendance, and these practices were not attributed to formal roles that could be assigned to someone present. This exploration of practices adds depth of understanding to Klandermans' (1997) stages of participation, with enrolment understood as a specific stage characterised by participants gaining knowledge and the groups engaging in particular enrolment practices which results in them making a commitment to spending time and dedicating effort to the group (Klandermans 2007).

## **5.3 Involvement**

Here I discuss involvement, which follows enrolment and is characterised by more regular participation with the group. Within the dating analogy, this is the relationship phase; the one that the groups hope will endure. Whilst each relationship is unique, there are common characteristics that inspire continuing involvement across the groups. They include ongoing fulfilment of shifting motivations, personal and group progress via individual and group practice performance, enjoyment, and an increased sense of comfort and belonging to the group. Involvement took many forms and participants understood their involvement to mean different things. Participants described how involvement was encouraged, evolved, and deepened, both by the wider membership, and the core groups of active members. Commitment remained flexible and controlled by individuals, according to their interests and availability of time, even as groups endeavoured to encourage greater involvement of participants. I discuss the practices that drive these changes, and emotional connections within the face-to-face encounters and the digital spaces of the groups. This is discussed further in chapter 6, which details the mobilisation practices performed in each group. I also discuss some of the challenges groups faced in encouraging and sustaining ongoing involvement.

### **Identifying different forms of involvement**

People talked enthusiastically about their involvement. Their commentary was positive about the numerous opportunities they had to be involved, the effects on their time or practices, their enjoyment, and the friends they had made. Linda, involved in the Energy group, and with a history of activism, expressed the emotional benefits she felt:

The more circles that you have that you are involved in the more grounded you are and the happier you are...a person you are contented, I wouldn't say happy but you feel like you have a purpose, you feel like you've got people that you can reach out to if you need them, so you're not alone and you've got your little tribe around you ... circles that you can rely on if you need help and so that's part of adult...basic human need is to be part of a group. (12.04.12)

She described the multiple advantages of involvement in groups: of contentment, connection, and belonging. These were themes repeated by many others. The rare negative comments lamented not having the time to be more involved. This enthusiasm was shared across the groups, and those with differing levels and longevity of involvement.

Whilst the groups' activities differed, it was possible to approximately categorise the kinds of involvement across them. There were five types of participation, with increasing numbers of participants involved as the typology progresses:

1. Leaders and core groups members: very active, unofficial roles in food-related groups, elected roles in the Energy group.
2. Specialist involvement: active contribution of specialist competence.
3. The 'usual suspects': active members who can be counted on to provide person power for specific projects or events.
4. Active participation: those who regularly attend events and volunteer days, or are active online.
5. Passive participation: through signing up for a newsletter, being part of an email list, or paying membership dues.

Passive participation was prevalent in the Energy group, due to its aim of growing its membership base to generate income, and increase the group's influence.

Participants described their involvement and commitment in relative terms. As Jenny explained: 'I'm just so busy with work...but I come at least once a month and more if I can...so I'm sort of a regular' (ID Nurture). For her, this felt like a regular commitment, though for others a monthly appearance would be a limited form of participation. Many participants also understood their role and commitment levels in relation to their repertoire of action in a range of activities and groups. For example, Susan told me about the groups she was involved in, explaining, 'I'm so busy now in my retirement but that's what I enjoy — a busy happy life'. She described herself as a regular participant in the Energy group, 'as long as it doesn't clash with choir' (11.04.12). She

was enthusiastic about the group and I saw her at many events, but this description revealed the limits of her commitment and how she prioritised certain activities in her repertoire. She highlighted, along with others, that a particular level of involvement was chosen in balance with other activities. Her repertoire of wider action was driving her happiness and therefore contributed to her continued involvement in all her activities. The relativity of involvement was also related to other members' actions and one's competency in group practices. As the groups were action-oriented, all those I spoke with at the involvement stage were aware of the projects and the work that went into them. Linda characterised her role in the Energy group:

I'm the kind of person who can make things, I'll put up stalls, I'm a behind the scenes...not so much behind the scenes but I don't do the front of house kind of representation and stuff (...) I'm kind of one of the stalwart back of house.  
(12.04.12)

She demonstrated her understanding of her own skills and what she could contribute, the requirements of the group in terms of resources, and her role within the core group and membership structure.

For some, a leadership or core group role was essential to their participation; to the extent that they could not imagine the idea of taking a passive role. Tessa explained: 'I couldn't just sit back and let others do the work, I had to get stuck in' (ID), contributing particular professional skills to the Urban Food group. Some preferred to leave the organisation to others. Ben distinguished between types of members:

Some people are more inclined to do it like you said, to be one of the planners in the group, sort of leaders and other people just want to do it, and that's what I want, I just want to roll up my sleeves and get down to it and start gardening.  
(22.07.12)

He knew precisely what he wanted to achieve, and how he wanted to contribute to the Urban Food and Nurture groups.

As highlighted in 4.5, subtle differences in perception of participants' involvement were expressed through the varying terms they used; 'listening', 'learning', 'pitching in', 'gardening', 'volunteering' and rarely being an 'activist'. The terms were all action-oriented, related to the groups' aims and their relatively apolitical nature. I mentioned to Lucy that I had noticed that people rarely talked about their 'activist' endeavours. She explained: 'This group is about the here and now — we talk about what needs doing today' and (laughing) 'yes you're right — there is no showing off!' (ID). I interpreted

this to mean there was a lack of virtue signalling within the group, in contrast to what she perceived happened in other kinds of action.

I was conscious that describing their involvement using these terms, with the implied commitment and political intent, also related to a wider social construction of what participation and activism meant. Hopkins (2008a) in his response to criticisms about the Transition Movement, confirmed the alternative approach of Transition and the benefits of community practice change, and collaboration (Chatterton and Culture 2008, Barry and Quilley 2009, North 2010). I discussed this with core group members later in the year. Louise also confirmed there was a difference between grassroots sustainability action and other forms of action within the environmental movement: 'People are here to learn — they listen to a speaker or learn how to do DIY. We are making an impact, but this isn't the same as Friends of the Earth' (Energy ID). The discourse of the groups centred on action. It was both an outcome of and a contributor to the culture of the groups.

### **Encouraging participants' involvement**

Mediated communications and social networks encouraged ongoing involvement (see Table 2 in 5.1 for summary of use in each group). Communications included both the external marketing discussed in 5.2 and internal communications such as use of emails. External marketing included a combination of formats, illustrated in Figure 6:

- Invitations sent via email and social media such as Facebook and Twitter.
- Project news shared mainly via longer formats such as email and e-newsletters, and some via social media.
- Sharing relevant sector news posted via social media.

November newsletter [Is there a small town in your community? Join us for a small town meeting](#)

## Muswell Hill Sustainability Group

**Welcome to our November newsletter!**

I was heartened to see Michael Bloomberg, Mayor of New York, refer directly to climate change - it's been a rare thing in the US election campaign, despite all of the extreme weather events over there! Closer to home we've been busy, and we have a number of exciting events coming up. This weekend we'll be at the [Great Compost Giveaway](#) at Ally Pally (Paddock Car Park) from 10-3pm - visit us at our stall when you come to pick up your compost! Then on 20th December we've got our Christmas social, lots of homemade food (all contributions welcome) and a fantastic speaker - Professor Paul Ekins (see more below). And in the new year on Feb 2/3, following on from the fantastic 21st Century Homes event in Highgate in September, we're running our very own 21st Century Homes Muswell Hill - Character, Comfort, Low Carbon. Hope to see you at one of these events soon!

*Cara Jenkinson, Chair*

[Friend on Facebook](#)  
[Follow on Twitter](#)  
[Forward to a Friend](#)

**DECC visit to Muswell Hill**

A team from the Department of Energy and Climate Change are visiting Muswell Hill on 4th December to see the good work we've been doing here. They will be meeting with Peter Thompson, our project co-ordinator, Mary Blake and Cara Jenkinson as well as visiting some local homes who have reduced their energy use by over 50%. They want to find out about the Low Carbon Zone success as well as our 100 Homes project and Low Carbon Buying Group. Separately Cara and Dermot Barnes are also meeting with Ed Davey's office at DECC to give them feedback on the Green Deal, and how they could boost take-up.

**2nd/3rd Feb 21st Century Homes Muswell Hill**

Renovating or extending your home? Replacing a kitchen or thinking of new windows? Wondering how to cut the draughts (or your fuel bills)? Intrigued by the idea of a 'greener' home? Let the architects, technical experts and exhibitors at our local event provide inspiration and the answers you need!

**Xmas Social**

Don't miss our xmas social at the Royal British Legion 7.00pm Thursday 20th December. Lots of homemade food (all contributions welcome) and a fantastic speaker, [Professor Paul Ekins](#). Paul is professor of Resources

*Muswell Hill Methodist*



## Energy group e-newsletter

Transition Finsbury Park  
Public Group

Joined Share Notifications

Discussion Members Events Photos Files Search this group

Write Post Add Photo/Video Create poll Add File

Write something...

**RECENT ACTIVITY**

**Mary Hogan**  
17 January at 17:21

Sat January 30 Railway Fields open 10am - 2pm. Keep yr New Year resolution about getting fitter, come and help Friends of R F do light gardening-type tasks between 10 and 12.30.

**ADD MEMBERS**  
+ Enter name or email address...

**MEMBERS** 378 members (2 new)

**Invite by Email**

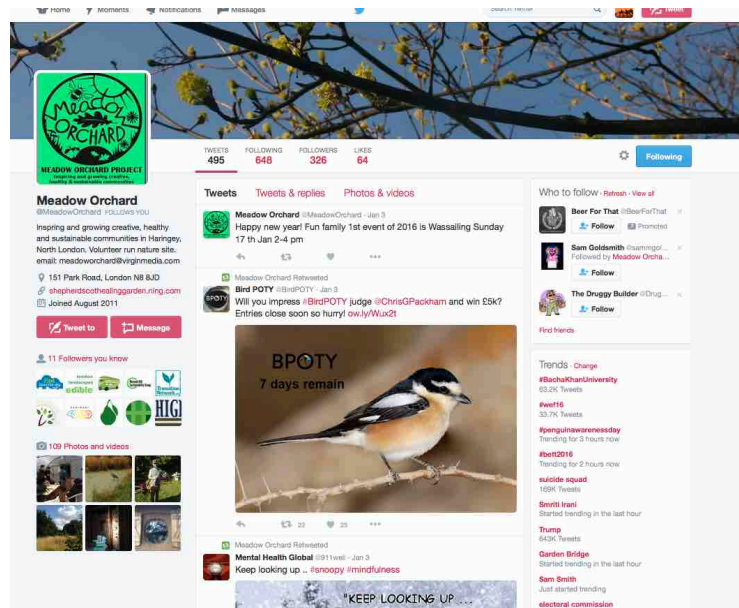
**DESCRIPTION**  
In Finsbury Park we are finding ways of living...  
See More

**CREATE NEW GROUPS**  
Groups make it easier than ever to share with friends, family and teammates. [Create group](#)

**RECENT GROUP PHOTOS** See all

**CREATE NEW GROUPS**

## Transition group Facebook page



**Nurture group Twitter profile**

**Figure 6: Energy group e-newsletter, Transition group Facebook page, and Nurture group Twitter profile.**

The frequency of the events held by the groups affected the rhythm of their communications: irregular (Energy and Transition), weekly (Nurture and Urban Food), monthly (Foraging) and quarterly (Borough Network). The frequency and formats of communications distributed was also affected by the capacity of the group to create and distribute content. These communications were vital as they served as a timely reminder of the events to attend and of one's membership of the group. The appearance of requested communications in personal spaces such as social media feeds or email inbox created a sense of intimacy.

Internal group communications were more detailed, personal, and included requests for help for furthering project progress. There were differences between the groups in the formats used. The Energy, Nurture, Transition, and Urban Food groups used a centrally controlled email sent out by the core group. The Foraging group and Borough Network used a listserv, which could be used by all members to communicate amongst the group. Core group controlled e-newsletters (formal) and emails (more informal) contained updates and requests for help.

The more active members would also receive separate emails for help. As Sophie, from the Energy group, explained: 'There are some "usual suspects" who we know will help out, so we tend to ask them first' (ID). For the Energy group, these requests were more frequent, and associated with additional activities, such as manning the stalls, or volunteering to help with the collaborative events. For the Nurture group, requests were often associated with particular material resources, or to spread the word about the community celebrations. Being included in such communications gave me a sense of being more involved, being relied upon, and a sense of guilt if I could not help out.

The listserv used by the Foraging group and the Borough Network handled group communications differently. As any member could send emails, there was a different, more collaborative and connected form of the group outside face-to-face encounters. I immediately felt a greater sense of belonging to the group because I could contribute directly to the conversations. For the Foraging group, the topics were tightly focused on relevant foraging information such as organising ad-hoc picking sessions, recipes, and sharing equipment. This reflected the focused activities of the group and the well-known, strict views of the person managing the list. For the Borough Network, the conversations were more diverse, mirroring the multiple concerns of the groups, working group updates, and discussions of collaborating with, and campaigning against, the council. There was a healthy level of conversation using the list with multiple emails each day. The conversation was inevitably led by particular personalities who were leading topical efforts, but I felt (after settling in) that I could contribute to stimulating conversations related to more overt forms of activism. The different approaches across the groups were interesting, as they reflected the capacities and aims of the groups and also overcame a shared challenge. For both Foraging and the Borough Network, events were relatively infrequent and opportunities to actively contribute to them were limited. Having ongoing conversations created a beneficial sense of belonging through virtual means, beyond the face-to-face encounters.

Interpersonal efforts were also used to encourage greater participation. Social connections were important in initial engagement, via the 'Chris Effect', and in enrolment through hitting it off with like-minded people. During involvement, participants' social networks within the groups were built. This meant that Chris (and other core members) were able to use both their persuasive powers, and participants' increased sense of belonging and responsibility to the group, to encourage them to commit to particular resource-contributions. As highlighted above, there was a snowball

effect; once one had been identified as a ‘usual suspect’, one was asked more frequently to help. Whilst this was often positive and encouraged the sense of belonging to the group, it could go too far. There were complaints of time-creep by some active members, and one felt their good nature was taken advantage of (ID). This was concerning, as it was a potential first step on the road to burnout (discussed in 5.4).

### **Deepening involvement in the core group**

Being more involved opened up new opportunities within the groups for more active participants. For example, opportunities to influence the future direction of the group, suggest new projects, contribute expertise, represent the group at the Borough Network, and, for the Energy group, take on an elected role.

Generally speaking, the more complex the activities the group was involved in, the more opportunities there were to be involved in different ways. In the Energy group, with its elected roles, multiple projects and events, and frequent involvement in external collaborations, there was more scope to utilise other talents and volunteer time to help. By contrast, the Foraging group, which focused on monthly foraging walks, required very little management. Involvement was limited to the few experts leading the walks and those attending. Attendees enjoyed the low-pressure nature of these events but had few opportunities to contribute non-topic-specific skills.

The type of involvement that predominated in a group also depended on its ethos and organisation; topics explored further in chapter 6 and 7. One example was the Transition model, which has a core group and projects radiating around that group. This structure encouraged people with particular interests to set up their own projects, develop ideas, and find similarly interested people to help them (Hopkins 2008b). Specific competencies and capacity (such as time) were required to lead the projects. Rose, who led events in the Transition group, explained: ‘You’ve got to be ok with leading it yourself...and most likely working by yourself... I found it a bit lonely’ (20.08.12). Whilst the model presented opportunities for individuals to progress, she identified challenges in her group due to a lack of support from other members.

The more active members and core groups demonstrated enthusiasm, knowledge, understanding of the culture of the groups, a sense of belonging, and appreciation of the benefits of their involvement during our discussions. Their initial motivations were also more strongly skewed toward the benefit of groups and community efforts; though it is



likely these reflections were influenced by their ongoing involvement. I noted that they were confident and comfortable in the face-to-face encounters, greeting friends, helping others feel more comfortable or helping them with tasks. As previously highlighted, the groups were characterised by practice change and therefore by an underlying element of experimentation. For those more involved, there was a deeper understanding of innovative aspects, such as permaculture (Urban Food and Nurture), cob building (Nurture), LCZ and installing solar arrays (Energy), and grafting in public (Foraging). This appreciation grew through greater understanding of the aims and the competences required to carry out such practices, and repeated practice performances. It was also due to the story of the groups being told in internal and external communications to showcase progress. Participants' appreciation of the requirements of these more innovative practices contributed to their ongoing involvement.

There were also some complaints. Levels of others' involvement attracted resentment from some. They usually complained about resource-related frustrations: that an idea or project not being able to progress, or an event not being as successful as they had hoped, was due to a lack of support, or personnel (IDs). As Karen lamented about the Energy group and Borough Network, 'it's always the usual suspects' (28.05.12). However, I noted there was very little done proactively to try to solve the issue.

There were also complaints by some new participants that they were not able to get more involved. One member explained that: 'the roles were already filled' (ID). On the surface this seemed to be an easy problem to solve. However, I noticed that these complaints were not aligned. The more involved wanted to have a specific form of additional involvement from others: people to do their bidding, rather than take a leading role. In addition, the complaints were used by some to highlight how much work they were doing. Other discussions suggested that often those individuals were not very amenable to delegating responsibility to other people (IDs). The new members wanted to contribute something more — ideas and influence — and were unable to do so.

### **Understanding involvement**

Ongoing involvement was encouraged through common practices-as-entity in the groups, though the details of the practices-as-performance differed (Schatzki 1996, Shove et al. 2012). Klandermans (1996) describes it as 'sustained participation'. Here, the practice lens adds details on how the participation was sustained through practice

performance. Social networks continued to be essential, with a shift to building them and having fun, and mediated communications complemented face-to-face encounters in deepening belonging. Thus spaces of contention — and connection — were co-created by the co-practitioners of mobilisation in the groups both physically and virtually (Martin 2013). Communications both reflected and contributed to the culture of the group through discursive framing of action and what involvement meant. I add nuance to the understanding of involvement by providing a typology and identifying the relativity of its understanding by participants. Involvement was successfully encouraged, though here was also the main challenge faced by groups; matching resources required and resources on offer from participants, fulfilling their motivations. Drawing on my previous professional experience, I could see this was partly due to an absence of planning and delegation. This was related to a lack of time dedicated to such leadership practices, to which I return in chapter 7.

## **5.4 Exit**

Having discussed engagement, enrolment, and involvement, I now move onto exits. Following the dating analogy again, the participant decides that either the match is not great enough to move to the next stage, or the relationship falters. Exits can be abrupt or gradual, and can happen at any time, or may not happen at all. As the extended ethnography revealed, groups were characterised by participants who were still involved ten years after they joined, as well as by those, such as myself, who had exited in some way.

I did not anticipate the importance of exits in research design and therefore did not approach any ex-members. However, participants explained their influence in their biographies of group participation and wider activism. The discussions of exits were not numerous enough to make any cross-group comparisons, however, they contribute interesting interpretations across the groups. I noted that core group-discussions within the groups gave little attention to exits. I was alerted to its omission through my shifts between groups, the discussion of it in the Transition group development training, and later through incomplete exits of my own. Core group members were aware of their importance. They felt a lack of control over them; as Louise from the Energy group explained: 'It is part of being a group. People come, people go' (ID).

The practice framework enabled a more nuanced understanding of exits, which are ripe for further investigation, particularly given the dearth of consideration in the current literature on grassroots sustainability group mobilisation (discussed in 2.1), and limited exploration at the individual level in social movements (Klandermans 1996). Understanding is also useful for groups: to minimise losing members, recognise and tackle potential triggers for exit, and limit negative impacts on those remaining. Discussions with participants revealed exits come in many forms, each with different drivers, timescales, impacts, and finality. The different forms of exit and their effects on the group are discussed next.

### **Not returning**

The first form of exit, and the most immediate, was that of attending an event or project and not returning: a failure to shift a newcomer from engagement to enrolment. Returning to my field trip (see 5.2), I was asked whether I liked the group enough to return. The answer depended on finding a fit: such as with the aims, activities, people, and culture of the group. My answer was a polite 'no'. There was competition for my involvement from fun projects closer to home, which influenced in my decision not to 'make time' to enrol with this group, even though I liked the people. For some participants, there was a lack of a cultural fit, explaining: 'It didn't click for me', 'they were a bit stuffy' and 'I find them a bit fluffy' (IDs).

Charles, who had met the Energy group through the LCZ, explained his non-return:

They seem a little bit, I don't want to say militant, but a little bit hardcore for me (...) they're lovely people but I just felt that if I didn't do everything that they said I should do, then I was going to be viewed very, very negatively and therefore it was just better not to get involved. That may be very harsh kind of picture of them and I didn't...I only had the one meeting. It just seemed like it was more of a commitment than I could give. (11.04.12)

He had concerns about the level of practice change he would be expected to commit and the adverse feelings on his emotions, thus it was simpler not to get involved. Louise's earlier conclusion was correct: groups cannot 'fit' with all newcomers' motivations. However, as identified earlier, there were several practices which could maximise their initial enjoyment and understanding of the group, and through which they could decide whether to return.

## **Declining involvement**

Exit could also be more gradual and occur after longer-term participation. Participants explained their declining involvement through the relationship between their motivations, time, the activities of the group, and how the group itself was changing. Many participants explained how other groups and interests competed for their time. Joseph described how his once-active involvement in the Energy group, was now in decline:

I've realised that organising things, getting involved with the running of voluntary organisations, like the Friends of the Park takes quite a bit of time and I realised I couldn't do both. (30.04.12)

The practices of management did not match Joseph's expectations. As a result, he was frustrated with the direction of the group:

Despite frequent requests...he [the chair] would never agree to identifying specific responsibilities for people.... it was all sort of seat of the pants stuff and hoping it would work out. (30.04.12)

As a result, Joseph was still a paid member but was selective in his commitment, only attending talks infrequently, rather than volunteering for other tasks. These two factors, competition and concerns with management practice, were connected. There was a tipping point, where competition for time and declining enjoyment combine to trigger diminishing participation.

For others, their exit was closely aligned to a motivation centred on a personal benefit. Natasha spoke of her trajectory through food-related groups, gaining the skills she needs to relocate and become self-sufficient in food and energy (15.06.12). Anita's career-change aim was to find a paid position in the sustainable food sector, so her involvement was both to gain skills and understand the challenges that food groups face (21.04.12). These aims placed a temporal limitation on their participation. Once the skills were mastered, their involvement would decline as they moved on. Tessa highlighted the role of sense of place and belonging, limiting her involvement in Urban Food:

This project is obviously a very local project, and I'm not a native, I don't plan to stay here, so I've always kind of felt like I had one foot out the door, because I don't ... for selfish reasons, I didn't want to get too involved in something that I was going to be leaving. (...) It was more about learning those skills and then being able to apply them for yourself at some later point. (24.05.12)

She also placed temporal limitations on participation, which affected her level of

involvement in the present, and why she was in honing in on learning opportunities.

Declining involvement was also identified as part of a longer journey of participation, with involvement perceived as a cross-group contribution. As discussed in 4.4, Diane moved between groups depending on their requirement for her competence in building projects. Thus from each group's perspective, her involvement waned. From her perspective, her commitment to the growing cause remained, as she moved in and out of project spaces. Longer journeys of participation included lifestyle changes that were cited for declining involvement, just as for initial engagement. These often pointed to a future intention to return, or find a suitable alternative that would fit with the participants' changing requirements. A lack of paid work explained the current availability of time for many. A member of Nature and Transition, Ben had been made redundant and explained that he would need to seek employment again once his redundancy money ran out (22.07.12). Though he saw his involvement as temporary, his long term desire was to return, describing how happy and healthy his participation made him feel. I was unable to follow up with him but was curious as to how his emotions were affected by knowing involvement was temporary.

Changes in family life featured in several stories of declining involvement. Angela described her exit as more permanent when having children reduced her free time. The local group's activities were no longer a good fit; neither occurring when she was available nor matching her evolving priorities. She noted that if the group initiated events aimed at families and children, then she would happily re-engage. Angela highlighted another factor; she had moved back to the neighbourhood to be near family to:

Have free and easy access to childcare and family community, and that means you become very lazy about going out to meet people because there's always someone ringing up saying oh shall we pop round and play for two hours (...) you know it's much less of an incentive to go out and meet new people when you've already got a close-knit group of people to cling to. (26.05.12)

Just as there was competition for her time, there was also competition in terms of social support. She now had her version of community through family and therefore did not seek an alternative through a group. This resonated with my experiences. My initial interest in groups partly stemmed from seeking community and wanting to meet those with similar interests. During maternity leave, I built a new social network with parents nearby, which took priority in my diminishing free time. There were practical

considerations of time and access, and also a feeling of guilt. My previously improving sustainability-related practices, in food and energy use, had been replaced with disposable nappies and car ownership. Whilst my communal concerns remained, and indeed were heightened through family life, my personal-benefit-related motivations had shifted.

The link between family and participation is particularly relevant given the assumption that critical lifestyle junctures can inspire greater concern for environmental issues associated with rational and individualistic behaviour change discourse, discussed in 2.1. I, and others, found that the increased challenge of involvement overshadowed communal sustainability-related concerns; due to access and time, and from changes to motivations at the personal benefit end of the spectrum (discussed in 4.2). There may have been opportunities for my continued involvement, but, given the competition for time and alternative support networks that did not induce feelings of guilt, my involvement waned. These connections between life stages, influences on practices, and the means of encouraging such changes are an important area for further research if practice change and the role of community are to be encouraged.

### **Burnout and partial exits**

The final forms of exit are burnout and partial exits. I heard the phrase ‘burnout’ frequently, explained as when a core member becomes physically and/or mentally exhausted as a result of their work with the group. This led to reducing involvement or exit, resulting in the rest of the group struggling to progress (IDs). It could also have a positive effect, galvanising action to support the afflicted person, with the rest of the core group addressing leadership practices to ensure sufficient resources were employed (IDs).

The local Transition groups were particularly aware of this problem, perhaps because the Transition group development training addressed these issues. The training proposed preventative measures, such as ensuring that members’ skills were effectively utilised, that roles and tasks were assigned, that projects were evaluated to make them more effective, and that time is dedicated to celebrating efforts. The training session itself provided further support as a networking opportunity for core members from several local groups. We met semi-regularly after the training to, as several members explained, ‘have a good moan’ (IDs) about how it was hard to implement the lessons from training, as the rest of the group felt it distracted time from other endeavours. Whilst there were

benefits to such group development training, being motivated enough to attend additional training, to then be unable to share competence and instigate new practices, was itself demotivating.

Exits can also be partial. My exit from the groups was gradual and incomplete. I progressively turned attention from energy, initiated through renovating a home, to food, as I was introduced through my social network for research purposes, and focus shifted attention to my garden. Later in 2013, new childcare routines reduced involvement further. However, I remained connected to the groups online and occasionally visited project spaces, which means I feel I could renew my involvement when logistics and time permit.

### **Impacts on those remaining**

Exits impacted remaining members. The exit of newcomers from enrolment, and of less active members during the involvement, was low-key. I looked for particular faces returning, but for the groups it was far less noticeable: hardly mentioned by remaining members. The exception was the Energy group due, as Debbie explained, there was a moment in time that heightened her awareness: when annual membership dues were not renewed (ID).

When more active members exited, there was a more significant effect, though mainly discussed as a past experience, as core group participation remained remarkably stable during fieldwork. The main consequence was increased pressure felt by the remaining core group members due to decreased group capacity, and the loss of core competences. Some also mentioned feeling upset and taking it personally (IDs). The degree of effects depended on both the complexity of the group's aims and the extent of the individual's role. A single person had mainly led the Transition group after other members 'fell by the wayside' (Emma 25.06.12). In struggling to maintain the group and recognising the dangers of burnout, she decided to take a step back and encourage a new core group to form, to resurrect the wider group on a firmer footing. This plan was initially successful, with a new group pulling together, meeting regularly, and putting on events. However, event attendance was declining, resulting in the core group feeling deeply disappointed at not successfully engaging and enrolling more people. Rose, another core member, described herself as fed up, explaining: 'I don't know what I'm trying to achieve.' ... 'I was, just trying to get people involved and making our sort of community but it's not quite working' (20.08.12). This perceived lack of success, and lack of confirmation that

her efforts were effective, was draining her emotional energy, highlighting the need for a positive feedback loop to maintain momentum.

Some also expressed an understanding of the complexities of participation and its cyclical nature, and the inevitability of changing involvement. For example, Emma, a lifelong activist, was sanguine and acknowledged the temporality of participation and the effect on groups. She explained:

I try to enjoy people's energy while they're there and accept what people have got to offer. Like I've always felt that quite strongly about the core group, I've never sent out resentful emails like why hasn't this been done or whatever because I know that I'm in one place and other people have got different levels of commitment, and I'd hate for some people to not do something and then feel so bad that they don't come along to a meeting or whatever, because they feel like they're not pulling their weight. (25.06.12)

This was an outlook that explained her longevity of involvement as she did not feel resentment and instead appreciated any contribution from other participants.

### **Understanding exits**

I had the sense that groups did not want to discuss what might be perceived as a failure, and the Transition group development training was the only time that exits were explicitly discussed in a group setting. My position as a researcher may have discouraged their discussion, yet the importance of exits gradually unfolded through the ethnography. The longevity of some members highlighted that, despite this lack of discussion, the groups were relatively successful in retaining involvement. My experiences also highlighted the messiness and partiality of exits.

Klandermans (1997) describes 'disengagement' of mobilised individuals in oppositional social movements. Often this is in relation to the shifts in movement development itself, with movement decline causing erosion of support. In these grassroots sustainability groups, there is a more practice change and inclusive form of environmentalism. Through discussions of longer journeys of participation, I gained understanding of how group mobilisation is a bundle of practices, co-performed by practitioners who are each on their own trajectory, coming together, often repeatedly, to perform *being* a group (Schatzki 1996, Shove et al. 2012). The practice lens draws attention to how aims can shift, competence may not be utilised, or develops to a stage where practice co-performance no longer fits with developing motivations. It also draws attention to the



longer-term development of activist (or rather the volunteer/member) habitus and how practices within groups can hinder this development (Crossley 2002). Participation can also be seen as a longer repertoire of action, which can be interrupted, may occur in other related 'fields' of contention, or suffer from competition from other interests or social networks (Diani 1992, Crossley 2002, Klandermans 2007). Understanding exits is essential to practices of leadership and management for mobilisation to be supported and expanded. In part this is a capacity issue; from my marketing background I understand that it is easier to retain and maximise the involvement of existing members rather than recruit new ones. New membership has its own benefits, through new ideas and resources. However, minimising avoidable exits is also a task for leadership, to which I return in chapter 7. As such, exits deserve greater attention in further research on the mobilisation of grassroots groups.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on the temporal development of individuals' participation, addressing how and why they are participating in grassroots sustainability groups, and the groups' practices of mobilisation that encourage and hinder this journey. The previous chapter explored the motivations for participation and how the groups provided multiple means to fulfil them. It characterised these place-based groups as a particular kind of inclusive environmentalism: the mobilisation of practice-change-oriented motivations, practitioners, and practice-performances. In this chapter, I have provided a more nuanced understanding of the stages of participation in grassroots sustainability groups and the practices of mobilisation at each stage.

Through the practice lens, I identified four stages: engagement, enrolment, involvement, and exit. This understanding builds on current understandings of grassroots groups and involvement as being static and homogenous (as discussed in 2.1), and adds nuance to understanding of journeys of individual participation in social movements (Klandermans 1997). Groups aimed to change practices (and associated environmental values) by providing expertise and a supportive environment in which to learn by doing (Hards 2011, Bradbury and Middlemiss 2014). These practice-bundles were recognisable as practices-as-entity across the groups, though the performances differed (Schatzki 1996, Schatzki 2011, Shove et al. 2012). To engage, shifting motivations coincided with serendipitous introductions or seeing mediated communications, and the

establishment of an attraction and fit with the group. To enrol, further experiential understanding of the practice-change opportunities, social and emotive aspects, and practical issues such as accessibility and expected commitment, resulted in a (typically informal) commitment to the group. Involvement then progressed through ongoing co-performance of group practices, with belonging deepening through building social networks and togetherness built in physical and virtual spaces. Opportunities for involvement in new practices (both practice-change focused and more managerial) evolved. Here was the main challenge for the groups: the tension between the roles that group leaders were looking to fill and those that the newcomers were hoping to perform.

There were continuous shifts: the newcomers gaining competence in partnership with the experienced and material changes in the groups' spaces. There is also a shifting combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar, such as the groups' increasingly understood routines, alongside the innovations in various aspects, such as energy technologies and permaculture. I characterise this kind of environmentalism as a journey of supported experimentation. The support through expertise and experimentation was ongoing. Importantly (as discussed in chapter 4) this form of inclusive and practice-change-oriented sustainability meant that action in groups also involved dispersed practices, individual competence, tacit knowledge, and shared repertoires of (apolitical) contention from other fields (Crossley 2002, Schatzki 2011). Put simply, getting involved in these grassroots groups was not an unknown and it was neither exclusive nor off-putting. Rather, practices within it — be it the co-created project space or virtual spaces, rituals, and bodily practices — resembled practices in other groups, work, or other leisure activities (Martin 2013). It balanced the new and the familiar though, as established in chapter 4, this was relative. Groups combine experienced activists (with radical habitus built and performed in other, more activist, spaces) with newcomers, with both perceiving their level of involvement and commitment in relative terms. The groups successfully merge these differing competences and resources to progress their projects, whilst at the same time meeting the motivations as they shift over time. This, in part, explains the longevity of these groups.

The focus on practices draws attention to key communicative practices: the visibility of groups through their effects on the environment, engagements with the public through their project activities, and their dedicated efforts to attract newcomers. Social networks recommending, introducing, and sharing communications are crucial (Diani 1992).

Through the journey of involvement, these communications practices shift; into the development of new social networks and into digital and private spaces, building belonging beyond (sometimes infrequent) face-to-face interactions (Martin 2013). Whilst these reflect the aims and rhythms of the groups' activities, they are also resource-intensive requiring particular capacities within the groups (Middlemiss and Parrish 2009), to which I return in chapter 7.

I finish on exits, which draws temporal scales into view. Comings and goings are inevitable in mobilisation, though the longer ethnography highlighted the relative stability in involvement of many of (those that became) the core groups. Action across groups and shifting participation over time, the relativity of involvement and commitment, and the events and life stages that drive changes in involvement, contribute to a meeting of multiple complex journeys of participation in groups. Participation sometimes halts, declines, is resurrected, or takes a more distanced form. Exits can be mitigated against through greater attention to roles and responsibilities, and the effects on remaining members reflected upon. They are, however, unavoidable and therefore the sanguine approach of Emma, of appreciating offerings of resources, and the maximising of their utility, by Chris, contributes to understanding why these groups and their form of environmentalism are still active at the time of writing in 2018. The details of the practices co-performed by participants and their mobilisation effects are now explored in chapter 6, where I linger with each group in turn.

## Chapter 6 Mobilising together

In this chapter, **Mobilising together**, I primarily address the second research question: **what are the groups' practices of mobilisation?** I focus on how practices were performed within each group and how experiential activities encouraged or hindered the involvement of participants. In chapter 4, I discussed individuals' motivations, the practice-change-oriented endeavours of the groups, and their performance of inclusive environmentalism. In chapter 5, I recognised common stages of participation across the groups, and the key practices of mobilisation performed to provide forms of supported experimentation for participants.

Here, I linger with each group in turn — exploring what they do together. They share common characteristics but differ in their aims and approaches. Here, I explore the entitativity (a term coined by Campbell (1958) meaning the perceived 'groupiness' of a group (Forsyth 2018)) through a practice lens, to explain how the groups mobilised and why participants returned. I bring my voice to the foreground to delve into practices, as the constant practitioner in each setting during the ethnography. I describe my experiences and the practices I observed, and explore recognisable practice-as-entities across the groups, though they differ in practice-as-performance in each (Shove et al. 2010). This exploration contributes a more nuanced understanding of group mobilisation as a practice-bundle and why these neighbouring groups, as a form of convivial sustainability, flourished and remained active at the time of writing in 2018.

As reviewed in chapter 2, literatures on grassroots sustainability groups have argued persuasively for the benefits of an experiential focus during group activities, as opposed to more informational approaches (Elster and Church 2002, Seyfang and Hexaltine 2010). Both work on Grassroots Innovations and social movements identify the varied roles of interpersonal relationships and their connection with group culture, access to expert knowledge, and community ownership in encouraging participation. The participants identified all these features as motivational aspects of the groups. The individual literatures exploring each type of group tend to focus on the outcomes of activities and benefits for their participants, as discussed in 2.1. Whilst these benefits are important, and are tied into the identified motivations for enrolling and remaining involved, there is limited understanding of how these groups ensure community-led action persists. This chapter aims to fill this gap.

Practices that encourage mobilisation have been identified, thus far, as experiential engagement tactics, welcoming newcomers, an array of practice change activities, and sharing food during social time. These enabled newcomers to assess their fit with groups and participants to build their social networks. Martin (2013), in her discussion of the role of place frames in mobilisation, highlights the benefit of not only using socio-spatial analysis for the assessment *of* contentious politics but also the socio-spatial relations produced *by* and *in* contentious politics. My attention was repeatedly drawn to these relations within group activities during my experiences of mobilisation. I was curious about how groups were using, affecting, and creating relations through different kinds of face-to-face interactions, ranging in location from public space to private homes. By examining these relations, comparing groups and giving attention to emotions (Jasper 2010) and senses (Valtonen 2009), I identified how socio-spatial relations are practiced and produced, and their effects on participants' emotional connections and ability to achieve their aims.

As described in chapter 3, I spent considerable time with each group to generate materials. Here, I foreground the participation and observation from a wide range of face-to-face and online group interactions over the fieldwork year 2011-2012 and beyond. Further evidence comes from interviews and informal discussions with participants, at events and in project spaces. The summary of activities can be seen in Appendix 3.

### **Structure of the chapter**

I explore the practices of mobilisation of each group in turn. I explain their aims, participants, the practices performed during face-to-face interaction, and their spaces and times of activity. Elements of ritual, dramaturgy, and reciprocity are discussed, explaining how activities meet the motivations of participants, and how emotions and senses are appealed to, creating a sense of belonging.

The Energy group, 6.1, examines the wide range of group activities in a variety of spaces, such as speaker events, DIY workshops, and campaigning stalls. The Nurture group, 6.2, describes their volunteering days with attention to the growing activities and the community-building project. The Transition and Urban Food groups, 6.3, focuses on the main active project, which used permaculture principles to produce food and seedlings for other community groups, as well as to provide training sessions. The Foraging group, 6.4, brings attention to the practices of harvesting and amendment of

public space for long-term benefits during the foraging walks.

## 6.1 The Energy group

First I explore the practices of the Energy group, which launched in February 2008 in Muswell Hill, and which was still active in 2018. I conducted my MSc research with them in 2010 and subsequently joined the group. The group's objective was to:

Support and promote a more sustainable future, to raise awareness of climate change and to encourage people in Muswell Hill and surrounding areas to reduce carbon emissions by 80% by 2050' (Energy group 2011).

The group educated its members and the wider public, mainly on renewable energy technologies and energy saving measures, and conducted timely campaigns on issues such as reducing the use of plastic bags. It collaborated with the council and secured external sources of funding. The Low Carbon Zone (LCZ), the main collaboration, is discussed further in chapter 7.

### **Making 'behaviour change' easy**

The group's activities were centred on education, awareness-raising, and changing practices through improved competence (Shove et al. 2012). 'Behaviour change' was an oft-used phrase, mirroring the policy and academic discourse discussed in 2.1. The group was aware of the difficulty of making changes; knowing how to read energy bills and switch to alternative energy providers, the expense of LED bulbs and solar panels, and finding competent people to do the work. Speaker events and stalls focused on information provision, workshops provided experiential learning, and the bulk-buying group increased the affordability of making household changes. Together the activities shifted practices, increased competence and access to materials, thus supporting individual practice change (ibid.). The LCZ collaboration brought the information and experiential into private homes (delivered by members of the group), provided free household measures, and made implementing paid-for measures easy through the council's appointment of a company to install them.

The lack of a single project space meant the group's face-to-face encounters took place at different indoor locations. Speaker events and the larger workshops occurred in a mix of local venues; usually a church, or the British Legion centre. Smaller 'Draught Busting' workshops and social gatherings took place in private homes. Stalls appeared

on the local high street (for gathering petition signatures) and at other community events (for driving membership and sharing sustainability-related information).

The first Energy group event I attended was a speaker event held at the local Methodist church. The church was collaborating with the group to install solar panels on the roof (Figure 7), thus providing an opportunity to see the progress of the project in situ. Speaker events occurred regularly and were the primary mechanism for engaging with wider publics. The events were free and un-ticketed. Attendance was driven by e-newsletters to members, printed promotion, and through the Borough Network and other local groups. A speaker event was a familiar format so, apart from curiosity about the topic and the group, the evening was relatively predictable. I had to familiarise myself with the route to the venue for each event, but they were all easy to access on foot or by bus. The events started at 8 pm, as did the other workshops, AGMs and planning meetings. The scheduling later became problematic for my attendance (due to small children) and explained why members with older children, or those without, characterised the group.



**Solar panels installed on the Methodist church**



**Energy group stall on the local high street**

**Figure 7: Photos of the Methodist church project and stall on the high street.**

### **Encouraging learning about producing and reducing energy**

As Table 4 illustrates, the speakers were experts in their field; either academics discussing macro issues around energy and climate change or professionals discussing practice-change-led solutions. Louise explained that a combination of topical discourse and access to speakers drove the subject matter of events (12.06.12).

**Table 4: Examples of the Energy group's speaker events.**

<b>Title and speaker</b>	<b>Date</b>
Information evening on boilers and insulation	Sep-11
"A Way Forward on Climate Change" by Professor Chris Rapley (UCL)	Mar-12
Solar information evening	May-12
"Community Energy Initiatives" by Professor Yvonne Rydin (UCL)	May-12
"Inequality and Sustainability" by Martin Wilkinson	Jul-12
"London's Water: Managing Drought and Flood" by Nick Reeves (Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management)	Mar-13
"Fracking - will it cut our fuel bills?" by Bob Ward (Grantham Research Institute)	Nov-13
"Passivhaus" by architect Justin Bere	Nov-14
Public meeting for Ed Davey (Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change)	Nov-14



Provision of expertise was a core ambition of the group and they were proud of their success. Frequently members, and others within the Borough Network, highlighted the impressive calibre of speakers. As Chris explained, they were invited through personal connections, or were amenable to speak due to the group's positive reputation, having a large and influential membership, and due to the quality of the speakers preceding them (06.04.12). I asked attendees why they were there, and the responses often related both to the topic and the certainty that this would be an inspirational opportunity to learn from an expert. Thus the group's reputation was built on providing — and core group efforts had to continue to deliver — such knowledge-imparting opportunities.

There were approximately 30 attendees, with subsequent events during the year attracting 20-50 people. Some were familiar faces from the other events, and Linda confirmed that there was a mix of existing members and newcomers (ID). I was not able to collect demographic data, but I observed that the attendees tended to be older, which was in line with the findings from interviews and informal discussions. Many participants were retired, with time to dedicate to the group or personal practice change. They also owned their homes, often old housing stock, which meant making material changes was both feasible and necessary.

My initial impression was that of familiarity of the bodily actions and routines that encompassed the speaker event, and the similarity to events in other settings, such as academia. Everyone sat in rows, with the chairs prearranged in the space, contributing dramaturgically to the formality of the event. Rituals included a formal welcome and introduction by the chair from the stage with details of the group's latest endeavours and an introduction to the topic and the speaker. The prepared talk followed. The chair managed the subsequent question and answer (Q&A) session, with audience members introducing themselves, politely praising the talk and posing questions. I was struck by how knowledgeable the inquisitors were, with the questions always resulting in a lively debate. This depth of understanding was later explained by the academic and scientific backgrounds identified by many attendees. I looked forward to the events, enjoying hearing the audience contributions and the speakers' efforts to answer difficult questions. This collaborative knowledge-creation was compelling. The speakers often praised both the insights of the group and their successes in local projects. I sensed they were well briefed and pitched their talk knowing there was a mix of knowledge levels, including those with considerable expertise, and they enjoyed the interaction. Their efforts added to the fascinating nature of the talks and inspired their loyal following.

Those present at the talks were comfortable, with audience members tacitly understanding the arrangement of the space and time, and how to be involved should they wish. The elected chair managed the routines, understood to be part of their role. As Susan explained: 'It's a bit like work used to be. I like the formality' (ID). The practices and rituals of formality were familiar.

### **Performing social time**

Mingling followed the Q&A. At that particular event, there was no dedicated space or time reserved for it. People chatted over the rows of seats and spilled out into the foyer. It was haphazard, with people milling about, eventually being urged out of the building. For those whom I later learnt were more regular attendees, I observed the work of social network building.

I felt uncomfortable. At later events I recognised similar reactions from others, with people sometimes quickly exiting after the main talk. Those I recognised at the event were already in deep conversation, and the lack of formal invitation to socialise within the proceedings meant I was not quite sure how to approach others. This discomfort was exacerbated by my natural shyness of strangers and also concerns of how to present my research-self to other members. However, other events and venues, aided by my increasing competence in my researcher role, were more conducive to my co-performance of social time. The British Legion, for example, had a stage much closer to the floor and small café-style tables and chairs lending a greater sense of informality. Initially the preserve of the twice-yearly social events, the social element also became increasingly important over the year, with more dedicated social time injected into all the events. Social time became more embedded — introduced as part of the proceedings and referred to in invitations.

Over time, I became increasingly comfortable at the events, building my social network through repeated encounters, a pattern I observed for other newcomers. The small group conversations tended to be associated with the subject matter of the event, or about individuals' recent efforts to make material or practice-changes in the home. My conversations often strayed into how a greater proportion of the public could be persuaded to get involved or change their behaviours to be more sustainable. This focus was related to the event topics, the group's endeavours, the prevailing discourse and inevitably my position as a researcher. I was introduced, with formal handshakes, to

other members as 'the researcher', and many suggested whom in their social network I should contact next. These social encounters were brief, standing up, with people circulating; similar in format to a networking event.

The event format gradually changed to include food and drink, with one of the final meetings I attended inviting people to bring a dish and share food before the talk. The food was laid out buffet-style and was mainly homemade, including sandwiches, quiche, salads, sausage rolls, and cakes. The shift in group's cultural practices was associated with the new chair actively seeking best-practice and noticing what practices worked well in other groups. In these later events, I noted that newcomers responded positively as core group members approached them and drew them into conversations, as the social time presented an opportunity to engage.

### **Gaining knowledge and confidence over time**

I left the event feeling inspired, with some scribbled notes and new knowledge. The talk reinforced my concerns, and it was enjoyable to be surrounded by those with similar interests who also lived locally. I had, however, advanced little on my journey of practice change. I wondered if other newcomers felt similarly and consequently slid into a passive-membership mode. Over the year, however, I found multiple resources that directly shifted my competence in energy-related practices. The information evenings were overtly about practice change, with experts and installers explaining the benefit, what was involved, and realistic cost. From those events, I left armed with details about household technologies — some immediately relevant for our home renovation. The website hosted detailed information about the progress of communal endeavours, such as the LCZ, and later the expansion of the solar panel installations, and the new project reducing the energy usage of schools. For individual practice change, there were recommendations for installers of boilers, solar panels and other measures, only accessible to paid members of the group.

As a new member, I was not explicitly directed toward these resources, but instead embarked upon a journey of discovery. Some information was delivered through the e-newsletter for paid members. I actively sought out some information by visiting the website. There was, I concluded, a tension between the exciting voyage of discovery, which kept me re-engaging with the group, versus the benefits of having all the information presented at the outset in order to encourage greater involvement. As

explained in 4.2, some participants stored information for later, and some had their interest piqued in new practice change due to the group's provision of information. I felt that each element of information or group activity came into view as I travelled through my journey of involvement and practice change endeavours.

### **Changing practices through experiential activities**

The group also provided experiential activities, each with different characteristics. Stalls at events (such as the Muswell Hill Green Fair in Figure 7) provided group information and energy- and water-saving materials for passers-by to handle. These interactions were often brief, though people would frequently take the free items on offer, such as water-saving bricks and power-down plugs.

Those who engaged with the group through the LCZ had a personal introduction to a wide range of household measures via the 'door-knocker' who arrived with samples to demonstrate within their home. I was persuaded by Chris to volunteer and found it demoralising when disinterested homeowners turned me away. However, Chris had spoken to many residents and 'warmed them up' resulting in enthusiastic take-up of the free measures and interest in receiving quotes for more complex measures such as wall and floor insulation. Both the stalls and LCZ experiential engagements were at the individual household level.

The 'Draught Busting' workshops, however, were a communal experience. As Lucy, who led them, jovially explained: 'energy isn't sexy', echoing a similar comment made by Louise (in 5.2). She explained how the group wanted to devise a way of learning about home energy use that was enjoyable. They provided a shared learning environment, led by an expert, which gave members the opportunity to practice installing draught-proofing measures in a local home. I pre-booked a spot as the sessions were always full, arrived at the home one dark winter's evening and was shown in. Initially, it felt peculiar being in a stranger's home. I was offered a cup of tea whilst waiting for the others to arrive. The homeowner enthusiastically explained that he was happy to host as he would learn how to do the DIY, and much of the job would be finished by the end of the evening. Others arrived, also looking slightly uncomfortable. Once assembled, we relaxed and introduced ourselves. Lucy explained the energy saving options for 'this sort of housing stock' (a familiar local Edwardian style), including secondary glazing, foam strips around doors, and draught-proofing windows — our task for the evening. Energetic discussion ensued, as everyone attending lived in

similar homes and faced similar problems, emphasised by the recent cold weather. She showed us the materials — long shaped strips of plastic with brushes, small nails and a hammer — and demonstrated on the nearest window. We all had a turn. I winced when first bringing down the hammer so close to the glass and others did the same, though everyone gradually relaxed and commented on how easy it was to do with some practice. I chatted to some of the attendees later at other events. Some had taken advantage of the cheaper materials and embarked on the DIY, or were planning to do so. Others, like myself, had decided to employ someone to do the job. This kind of intensive communal experiential teaching was effective; it made DIY achievable, imparting new competences and familiarity with materials, and affordability via the bulk-buying scheme. In my case, I gained the competence to assess whether a more professional solution was needed. Once we got going, it was also fun.

### **The impacts of my involvement**

My perception of the environment shifted as my knowledge grew: I saw the potential for change everywhere. I pointed out appropriate sites for solar panels, and I noticed draughts and assessed how easily they could be fixed. Impacts on my practices were aided by being highly motivated to make immediate material changes at home. I experienced an enjoyable and sociable journey through the various group activities, which gradually contributed inspiration, information, skills, and materials for my endeavours. Making change felt achievable, as well as exciting and a little bit alternative. I turned the thermostat down, put on a jumper, and stuck draught-proofing strips around the doors. I knew where to find information and, crucially, whom to ask. There were many experts within the group and they were happy to provide support. Later, I was able to reciprocate to other members of the group. Whilst not an immediate form of direct collaboration (a topic I return to in chapter 7), this give and take from the group was a form of intra-group collaboration over time.

Whilst participants found it hard to attribute impacts of involvement to any specific group activity, they explained they were practice-change-oriented and mainly individual, with changes to the home or other lifestyle behaviours. They also highlighted their enjoyment of the social and communal aspects of group action. Discussions highlighted the support available; access to technical expertise, experiential opportunities, and materials through the buying group. Co-performing new practices increased members' competence, removed the fear associated with the unfamiliar and new materials, and created a shared knowledge scheme within the group (Rasche and

Chia 2009, Shove et al. 2012). Performing them in the home, the space in which they would then be repeated, increased the effectiveness of this approach.

This use of the private home, and the discourse within the group activities of how to make space more productive and less wasteful, rendered energy more visible and communal, and resonated with the efforts of the food-related groups. Whilst the Energy group did not create a single 'heterotopia' (as Eizenberg 2004 used to describe community gardens) there were similarities in their efforts. The group encouraged participants to perform alternative practices, which countered the prevailing political, economic, and cultural arrangements of the urban environment through challenging the dominant systems of provision, albeit in small ways (ibid., Shove and Walker 2010). I saw it as a form of spatially-dispersed heterotopia, which became visible in particular spaces.

Thus, the group encouraged supported experimentation for individuals, and provided communal benefits for the group and wider community. For the more active participants, there were more emotive social benefits through the (increasingly) convivial rituals performed by the group. Although the culture and discourse of the group was apolitical and community-inclusive, participants spoke of alterity. The group was highly professional, resonant of discussions of professionalisation in social movements (Diani 1992). However, rather than this being a stage of movement development, this professionalism was deeply embedded in the rituals and culture of the group and, I argue, it had significant benefits in the context of energy. Action on energy, in comparison to food, was a more individual, complex and risky endeavour. Efforts to make energy visible were relatively new, and practice-changes through, for example, installing solar panels, were expensive and could ultimately show no return on investment. The group's version of alterity, therefore, was scientific and data-driven — in producing energy and reducing carbon dioxide emissions — and involved costs, household material changes, and potential risks. The group represented an exciting opportunity to experiment individually and to make energy communal by contributing to larger scale community energy experiments. However, it did so in a familiar and stable way through its professional rituals and culture, in a group exhibiting a high level of 'groupiness' and cohesion (Forsyth 2018).

## 6.2 The Nurture group

Lucy from the Energy group introduced me to food growing and the Nurture group, located between Muswell Hill and Crouch End. The group launched in 2010 with the aim of '[i]nspiring and growing creative, healthy and sustainable communities in Haringey' (Nurture group 2011) and was still active at the time of writing. The project leased disused land for a nominal rent from the local NHS trust and used it for conservation, with wildlife areas, food growing, and an eco-building. Each element was at a different stage of development during my fieldwork.

### **Nurturing practice change and community building**

The group's activities were centred on learning about food and cob-building techniques through volunteering days, and providing a community space for other local groups. This group space resonated with Eizenberg's (2004) community-garden style heterotopia. Building community and personal resilience through well-being and social networks was also important, similar to the Transition model (Hopkins 2008b). Volunteers collaborated with those with shared aims, had access to skilled individuals, and materials to support their learning and individual practice change, whilst progressing the improvement of the group space.

Once I signed up to the project's social networking site,<sup>18</sup> I received weekly invitations to attend volunteering days. 'Eco-build volunteer days' were on Fridays, and growing 'site workdays' on Saturdays, affecting who could attend, depending on their work schedules. There were further invitations to community celebrations and training days. I met participants of other groups from within the Borough Network, who had seen the events promoted on social media.

This was my first volunteer day and I felt a little trepidation. On my first visit to the site, I got lost. I had already taken one wrong turn off the main road, and now I was in a car park behind the medical centre, slightly baffled. Eventually, I spotted a closed gate but no signage, pushed it open and saw the base of the cob building that Lucy had described, in front of me to the right. To the left was a lean-to amongst the trees, containing wood and other building materials. There was no one around, and I was trying to get my bearings when I saw a figure in the distance beyond the building site.

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<sup>18</sup> They used NING, an online platform which community groups can personalise.

There was hazard tape set up around the partial construction, so I skirted around and found the expanse of the project space. The entrance and cob building are shown in Figure 8. The location, size and layout of the space resulted in a particular movement to and through it. During that first experience, I felt a sense of discovery as I moved from urban to 'wild'. Each time I came back to this oasis of calm within the city, I would anticipate how the areas within the space had changed.

I arrived as tea was being made using a large camping kettle, a routine I noted at each volunteering day. Lucy introduced me to the seven people there that day, who all knew each other. They sat comfortably, finishing their tea and chatting about the next tasks. Other volunteer days attracted between five and twenty, with a core of approximately eight familiar faces and a few others who attended less regularly. There were frequently new faces who had been introduced by a friend, or were attracted by specific events. Over my visits, I noted a wider age range than the other groups, and those bringing family members along, including children.



**View into the project space from the entrance**





**Cob building under construction**



**Food growing area**



**Pond and meadow area**



**Poly tunnel, composting toilet and social area**

**Figure 8: Photos of the Nurture group's project site.**

Lucy gave me a site tour; a welcoming ritual I saw repeated by core group members and which, as others also noted, was essential in helping newcomers settle into the space (IDs). The space included a secure shed used for tools and personal valuables. A hand-drawn map of the site with some information about the project was erected on a post. A large wooden shed contained a composting toilet which Lucy explained how to use and which was impressively clean and smell-free. There was a large picnic bench with seating for eight, with additional hand-made wooden stools, tea making facilities, and



plans for a fire pit. Then the expanse of the project: a growing space housing vegetables, edible flowers and herbs, a poly tunnel, an orchard, wide open ground, a pond, an area for beehives, and the cob building site near the gate (Figure 8). All these elements combined to make the atmosphere natural, relaxing and homely.

As she showed me around, she mentioned permaculture in passing, a term I was not familiar with at that time. It was only after hearing more about it at Urban Food group, and attending a permaculture and forest gardening training course later in the year, I began to understand the level of planning and experimentation that was involved in the design and management of this 'wild' site.

### **Getting our hands dirty**

After tea, Lucy quickly got me to work. Whilst chatting was encouraged, and the pace of action was leisurely and self-directed, there was always an underlying sense of purpose. There was a to-do list for the day's endeavours. That day, I first helped Rachel write the names of plants onto sticks to put around the site. Whilst this task was educational and gave me a chance to soak up the atmosphere, I felt conscious that I was repeatedly asking others for their Latin names. They helped me patiently, despite my distracting them from other tasks. The helping of less-skilled individuals was characteristic of the group. I was informally learning on the job. At other times, the teaching was briefly more formal, with the group called together for a particular task to be demonstrated.

It was a glorious day and my senses were awakened. The soundscape struck me: it was quiet — occasionally interrupted by birds, an aeroplane, murmurs of chatter, and tools clattering. The more typical sounds of the city were absent despite our proximity. I had numerous informal discussions during volunteer days, asking participants questions such as their reasons for being there that day (see Appendix 3 for details). Frequently the volunteers' answers were associated with both advancing the project and with nature, bird spotting, relaxation, mental health benefits, and 'catching up' with friends. Several mentioned the quiet and peaceful ambience. I looked forward to the sensorial aspects of the peaceful oasis; it combined an escape from the city with my developing interest in growing food. The primary emphasis was on personal well-being and physical work, rather than explicitly on learning, even though the latter invariably featured for those less skilled as they worked side by side with those with more experience.

Volunteers enjoyed the work: its physical nature, 'getting hands dirty', seeing the fruits of their labour, often literally (IDs). Ben came over and broke a leaf of the plant in the bed in front of me: 'smell this' he encouraged and wandered off. I could not name the plant but recognised the smell from the tea I'd tasted earlier. Later he explained it was lemon verbena. I had interviewed Ben previously; he had described his childhood and explained how he now wanted to become more 'connected to the earth' (22.07.12). His invitation to smell heightened my sensorial experiences; physical work and hands in the earth, the smell of the plants, the soundscape, and taste of the herbal tea. Over my visits, the dramatic visual changes struck me; most noticeable in this group due to the progression of the building work and the different seasonal effects on the woods, pond, grass, growing beds, and orchard. Many, including myself, explained they were compelled to return to the project to see 'how things were getting on' (IDs).

Whilst the invitations had a start and end time, people arrived and left at different times. This flow added to the relaxed feel of the project and meant that contributions could be as lengthy or brief as volunteers could manage. Some stalwarts were there all day. Other people 'popped down' amongst other commitments. Often those who intended to stay briefly remained much longer. The weather made a huge difference to the attendance levels, and the greatest number tended to congregate around lunchtime.

### **Performing social time**

Social time was when the work of group networking was done. At lunchtime, typically someone set the process off by sitting down and getting food out. Others would gradually drift over, and the food was shared informally. This ritual featured in all the volunteer days though it was not explicitly mentioned as part of proceedings in the invitations. It was picnic-style, with a mix of homemade contributions and shop-bought offerings wrapped in plastic. The food was usually vegetarian — those who were not would bring food suitable for all. Invariably someone brought along something sweet, or a packet of biscuits to accompany tea, itself usually herbal. Those attending lingered over food and chatted about the project, efforts to grow food at home, other community events (here I was invited to the cross-group Green on the Screen monthly film night down the road), and occasionally wider campaigning issues.

After lunch, I was thrown into the deep-end of the food-growing beds to weed and plant some seedlings. Others were working nearby on different beds. Volunteers were

working independently or in pairs. This was driven by the task required, but I also noted that some people preferred to work alongside each other and chat, whilst others enjoyed their solitude. It was hard work, particularly in the sun, and next time I remembered to bring a hat and sun cream. The work was sweaty, characterised by bending down, leaning over and frequently asking others for advice. This was my first volunteering session, and it was relaxing. Being focused on a physical task, which required concentration insulated me from other distracting thoughts. I felt a mix of positive contribution and also the need to take care; I was a newcomer and did not want to damage the plants through my lack of knowledge. The tasks changed each time I attended, with longer-term seasonal influences, and shorter-term effects of extreme weather. A group of us put down mulch using old cardboard, to prevent the weeds from reappearing, and cleared the brambles. I ached the next day.

### **Nurturing individual resilience**

Lucy explained that there was an aspect of nurture and well-being within the aims of the group (08.02.12), which I felt and others also described. It was a space for relaxation. Sometimes there were community groups present, such as yoga classes and a mosaic-making workshop. Amy from the Foraging group was there one day talking about local food to a meditation group who sampled her foraged dishes. The extended use of the space was highly managed behind the scenes by Lucy, but for those attending events or volunteer days appeared as a relaxed and natural part of the community-ownership aim of the project.

The expanse of grass next to the pond housed a domed metal structure (similar to a children's climbing frame) for people to gather within. It was a calming, 'held' space; a term I became familiar with at the project and during Transition activities (it is related to work on Inner Transition).<sup>19</sup> Lucy, heavily involved in the Energy group and Nurture group, was active in a group working on Inner Transition and the local Transition group. The permeation of cultural practices and terminology became apparent over time, carried by particular practitioners such as Lucy (Röpke 2009, Shove et al. 2010). An important group practice was that of celebration, which was heavily influenced by Lucy and Wendy (also from Transition) in line with the Transition ethos (Hopkins 2008b). Celebrations included ritualistic elements such as standing in a circle holding hands, fire, and song. Events included a 'Summer solstice flower celebration' which

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<sup>19</sup> Inner Transition encourages groups to look after themselves well in order to be much more effective catalysts for change (Transition Network 2018).

invited attendance highlighting sharing food, cocktails, 'firey fun, magic and sparkle' (16.06.12), an 'Earth day celebration with mindfulness meditation and mud' and a 'Cob oven community bake'.

Those from the local Transition group often hosted the events, the Foraging group frequently featured, and they were widely promoted in the Borough Network. This promotion meant that they attracted a different audience and, I noted, one mainly comfortable with the ritualistic aspects of the events. I initially felt uncomfortable as they were unfamiliar practices, and I understood what Helen meant when she engaged in the practice of othering, describing the local Transition group as 'fluffy'. Over time, I grew to enjoy them and understood their dramaturgical purpose. Aside from the celebratory aspects, the use of space was a call to be together. Circles and holding hands brought an immediate level of intimacy to the group, through physical touch and proximity. We concurred that there was something wonderfully uninhibited about sitting around the fire, listening to songs and poetry.

### **Building a space for community**

Later in the year, when the weather was warmer, I attended a cob-building volunteer day. This sub-project had several aims: to experiment with and impart skills for constructing sustainable buildings using traditional materials, and to provide a space for performances, art installations, and other community groups to use. There were six other volunteers and I was surprised to find that one had cycled for miles from Hackney. He explained that this was the only place he could find to learn about cob that was not a paid-for, and therefore unaffordable, training day. Another volunteer had heard about cob building from a friend and the others were familiar with the overall project. We were shown how to mix the cob ingredients — clay, sand, straw, and water. It was hard work; filling the wheelbarrows and combining the ingredients. Lucy warned us to take our shoes off so they did not get stuck. We used our feet to work the mixture together to the correct consistency but repeatedly had to check with the more experienced, who shouted over to us to add more water or put more effort into it. It was fun, though despite John jovially claiming it was like having a foot spa; eventually my feet started to hurt from the abrasion. I asked how this was performed in poor weather; Rachel explained that not surprisingly there were few volunteers then and progress slowed down (IDs).

I caught up with Diane who was inside the building beyond the tarpaulin; the structure had grown significantly over my visits and was now protected from the elements. I first met her at the Urban Food project. She bemoaned the lack of precision of the last few sessions' construction efforts and now had to conduct some remedial work (ID). I asked whether this was a frequent occurrence. She paused and explained yes, the more experienced (by which she meant professional) were not always there to supervise. She then moderated her complaint by praising the efforts that were being made in her absence: 'I can't grumble too much' (ID). For her, there was a tension. Her contribution of professional skills and wanting to achieve high standards, as a reflection of her direction, sometimes clashed with available resources being volunteer-based. Someone else was also managing the balancing of those resources and aims, which meant she felt out of control of the bigger picture.

This tension was also a group-level dichotomy; the project aimed to engage experientially and therefore encouraged those with no competence to contribute. However, there was also the final goal of completing the community space. It was already far behind schedule and was lacking resources to complete parts of the structure. The combination of building and growing meant that the reasons for people attending were different. The time was managed differently; with the 'eco-building volunteers' day' and the 'community garden volunteer day' each week (and more frequently when the weather was good), some had elements of both. There was overlap in attendance, with interest in both, and a different constituency too. The building project necessitated particular professional skills such as architecture and carpentry. Experienced and enthusiastic lay people drove the growing project. There was, on occasion, a conflict in focus, such as Diane explaining she was annoyed that so much time had recently been diverted to the growing tasks, whilst Lucy explained that the recent weather meant they had to focus on those tasks.

### **The impacts of involvement**

The impacts of my involvement with the Nurture group were intertwined with the other food-related projects. Over the year, my practices shifted gradually. I performed a new practice-as-entity: growing vegetables at home, after receiving some seeds and feeling more competent in how to look after them (Shove et al. 2010). Having tasted a variety of new herbs, vegetables and edible flowers, I became more experimental in my shopping, thus gradually shifting practice-as-performance of a broader dispersed practice (Schatzki 1996, Shove et al. 2010). Increasing my knowledge of seasonal

produce, I became aware of what was available from the UK, with associated lower food miles. Many other attendees mentioned similar impacts on home-growing and shopping practices.

Competence was gently nurtured — it was more gradual than the experiential efforts of other groups, building with each embodied performance. This was due to the aims of the project: to focus on individual well-being and create a volunteer-built community space, which resulted in a slower pace of change at the project. The sensorial and physical aspects of the experiences heightened the effects of both learning, relaxing, and belonging to the group. Those I met who were frequent visitors were dedicated and loyal over time. Those in attendance usually became absorbed in the activities, lingering far longer than planned. There were positive effects on well-being, feeling connected with others in a shared community, which also allowed people to relax on their own.

Fun and the social glue of sharing food and celebrations were crucial: building the social network within the project that, in turn, sought to provide community infrastructure and well-being. These were the rituals that built the ‘groupiness’ of the group (Forsyth 2018). The project was a microcosm of an idealised resilient community created through collaborative and convivial sustainability. It was more planned and innovative than it appeared on the surface, with the use of permaculture, experimental building techniques, and coordination with other community groups. The group's alterity stemmed from its holistic nature; combining re-wilding with nurture and careful management.

## **6.3 The Transition and Urban Food groups**

I moved further east and spent time with the Transition group, and their main project the Urban Food group. I was intrigued to see how food-related activities could be mobilised in different ways to the Nurture group. The Transition group endeavoured to promote 'ways of living that are based on localised food production, sustainable energy sources, vibrant local economies and an enlivened sense of community, rather than cheap and polluting oil' (Transition group 2011). The group aimed to use 'local resources, local community and local knowledge to achieve this' (ibid.).

The most active sub-group within the Transition group during fieldwork was the Urban Food group, which launched in 2010 and was still active at the time of writing in 2018.



The food-growing space was located in a corner of Finsbury Park, fenced off alongside a commercial plant nursery. The group produced edible plants in order to increase the availability of local food, provided training in growing techniques to ‘strengthen the local community’ (Urban Food group 2011), and had a connection with a local mental health service so users could come and use the space. The food-growing project contributed to the overall Transition aims by helping the local community become more resilient, and supported other local growing projects to launch by providing seedlings. The group explained its rationale:

There is a need for locally produced plants that can be used in nearby growing projects and for locally trained people to produce and maintain the supply. Currently, such trees and plants are produced in commercial nurseries based outside London failing to benefit the local economy, the local skill base and the environment as a whole. (Urban Food group 2011)

Emma explained that there was an expanding market for edible plants; from home growers, local Transition groups, friends of parks groups, and community support organisations (25.06.12). The project could help meet this demand and with a much lower carbon footprint (ibid.).

### **Teaching us to grow**

The group’s activities were centred on individual learning through volunteering and formal experiential training opportunities. There were additional aspects such as community resilience built through helping mental-health charities. Volunteers had access to skilled individuals who supported their learning, and there was considerable focus on experiential aspects of food through its picking and eating.

Emma introduced me to the project. For most participants, their engagement was via introductions from friends, through the Transition group or other local promotion. As the space was within the park, with signage outside, it drew in passers-by. The volunteering days were on a weekday each week, with periodic reminders on social media. Just as in the Nurture group, there was an official start and end time, though volunteers were similarly relaxed about coming and going, tending to congregate around lunchtime.

By now, I was more familiar with the notion of a volunteer day and was curious as to how it differed in culture and practices. The project was easy to find. I entered the expanse of Finsbury Park; characterised by the typical municipal feel of a London park.

Then I entered the project site that, from the outside, exhibited a distinct contrast between an industrial-looking perimeter, enclosing lush vegetation within. Once inside, a large growing bed confronted me directly ahead, shown in Figure 9. It was visually striking, due to the variety of plants and flowers within it, and the way they were arranged, with multiple layers and heights. On the tour of the project by Emma (given to all newcomers) I learned it showcased 'forest gardening' planning, and consisted entirely of seasonal edible plants and flowers, with signage explaining what they were. This bed was used within volunteer days and training sessions to demonstrate techniques and invite people to smell and taste the plants.



**The show bed near the entrance**





**Growing beds and social area**



**Growing beds**



**Shared lunch using foraged food**

**Figure 9: Photos from the Urban Food group's project site.**

To the right was a large greenhouse. This part of the site was used mainly by the commercial plant-nursery, though the Urban Food group used it for the paid-for training sessions during poor weather. It was also less bucolic, with an office, kitchen and indoor toilets. However, the produce from the project had infiltrated; there were many unfamiliar ingredients picked from the site, which I gradually became familiar with through their use in herbal tea and other dishes.

To the left of the entrance was the Urban Food space, with growing beds and a small greenhouse for keeping belongings dry. On the far side of the beds was a low wooden table with wooden stools; all made by volunteers. This was the sole area for sitting, and the low stools were uncomfortable after a short time. Site development and experimentation were ongoing. Later in the year, a small open-to-the-elements composting toilet was built. Apart from in warm and dry weather, this was ignored in favour of the inside toilets. Water availability was problematic, and so a rainwater collection system was installed with input from Diane (the architect from the Nurture group).

Typically, attendance was between 5 and 15 people. The core group of volunteers was similarly consistent in their regularity to the Nurture group and there was some overlap in faces between the two. The age-range and demographics were slightly more uniform. Many highlighted a shift in work circumstances as an explanation for their ongoing volunteering and their availability for volunteering on weekdays. The appearance and feel of the space, whilst natural, was also highly managed due to it being densely vegetated, with a mix of growing food and tree saplings. The beds appeared quite orderly. Emma explained that each section was at a different stage of growth, and detailed the process whereby they would grow seedlings, which would then be transplanted into pots (ID). It was a seasonally driven production line. She described how they were continually experimenting using permaculture and forest gardening techniques to see what would successfully grow in such a small, urban setting (ID). They were responsive to their successes on site and reported success from the other groups.

Whilst the site was substantial, the fence could also be seen from the inside. Movement through the site was constrained to the walkways through the beds. Thick vegetation often restricted my view. In other places, I could see through the fence to the expanse of the park beyond. This gave the impression of the space being concentrated and contained, which contrasted greatly with the expanse of the meadow in the Nurture site. Alongside the managed nature of the growing space, the overall feeling of the project was one of endeavour, and less about relaxation.

A critical aspect of permaculture and forest gardening is using resources efficiently. Resources include labour, light and water. There was a significant focus on perennials, and, through experimentation, identifying plants that needed less human tendering and had lower water requirements. There were still plenty of tasks for volunteers. The site was an experimental version of a forest garden, and volunteers crammed the week's work into just a few hours. The tasks included watering, weeding, planting, transplanting, and mulching and were driven by seasonal requirements and shorter-term reaction to prevailing conditions. There was always a lengthy to-do list and an emphasis on hard work. The work was sweaty and used muscles and movement unfamiliar to my (usually) desk-bound body. There was less time for relaxing and soaking up the sounds of nature. However, the hard work was extremely rewarding.



The more experienced helped those with fewer skills. The compact nature of the site meant it was easy to shout out for help. I frequently saw Emma, who continually circulated amongst the volunteers, giving helpful hints and checking their technique, like the conductor of an orchestra. I felt I had reached a milestone when I was finally able to offer advice to others with less experience, having gradually gained competence and confidence through repeated practice performance. Everyone collaborated to tick as much as possible off the list before stopping for lunch.

### **Performing social time**

Just as in the Nurture space, the seating area was the hub of socialising, particularly as there was no other open space in which to sit down comfortably. During clement weather, people deposited their belongings, and food for sharing around that space. The core focus of the project on growing edible food meant that the shared lunch was a crucial part of the cultural practice of the group and consisted of a specific and consistent set of elements. It was essential for the social work of the group and served as 'the introduction' for newcomers. I found them immensely enjoyable and informative.

First, there was the agreement between the core members that it was time for lunch; no-one else ever instigated the process. The volunteers gathered, and instructions were given out (when needed). Water was boiled, various herbal teas made, cutlery and crockery gathered and brought out to the table. It felt extremely civilised. A central dish of the meal would be a picked salad from the site, with Emma or Amy explaining what was in it as we tried each ingredient; my favourite was nasturtium flowers. I enjoyed the combination of new flavours, the novelty of eating flowers, and finding easily grown plants similar in flavour to shop-bought foods.

The food was strictly vegetarian. The effort put into the meals by the core group members meant that there was usually a reciprocal effort to ensure that the food was suitable for their vegan dietary preferences by the more frequently involved, who knew of them. There were no plastics, other than if someone had bought fresh bread or similar from the local shop near the park. The first few times I was concerned about what to bring. The first time, in a slight tizz, I grabbed some Hobnobs which, fortuitously, were vegan and well-received. I noted other newcomers were sometimes similarly awkward in their initial offerings, but they were always appreciated. At the end of the meal, there was a similar communal process of clearing up, carrying plates to the kitchen and washing up. The practice was orderly, tacitly understood, and contributed to the impact

of the shared lunch. I looked forward to it and others attending confirmed they also enjoyed the rituals of shared food (IDs).

Conversations during the meals were convivial and usually food-related. We discussed the ingredients within the dishes, what we thought of their smell and taste. The contributor explained how they had made the dish and where the elements had been sourced. This process was sometimes complicated, using technology such as a dehydrator, which Amy lent out to those who wanted to experiment. She used it to make fruit crisps and dry acorns for milling. Amy was passionate about reducing food miles by eating locally-sourced food. She brought dips to lunch, explaining they were made from local wild garlic, and UK-grown pulses and flaxseed oil. Each lunchtime she would update us on her mission to source more local ingredients from obscure suppliers, rather than using flown-in varieties. She successfully proved that they were just as tasty and, over time, several volunteers, myself included, experimented at home.

Through these practices and discussions, I became more familiar with the specifics of veganism. There was a range of diets amongst the volunteers. Some were vegan, some were trying to eliminate various elements, and some were becoming vegetarian. Experimenting with diet seemed to be an inevitable natural consequence of becoming more knowledgeable about the range of edible plants and flowers that were tasty alternatives. Equally, all those involved were already interested in growing food, hence their involvement. Here, the coming together of burgeoning interest, changing competence and access and understanding of materials, was shifting practices (Shove et al. 2012).

Once lunch was finished, we got on with the work. The afternoons tended to be more relaxed with people leaving whenever they pleased. Often there would be fleeting visits from others who had not been able to join the day but wanted to pop in and say hello and, as in the Nurture group, frequently ended up staying longer.

### **Attending formal training sessions**

I attended several of the group's regular training courses. The topics included:

- Tree grafting and hardwood cuttings
- Plant identification and eating
- Plant names and families for beginners (taxonomy)
- Tree grafting and plant identification

Emma explained that they had recently stopped providing courses for free due to attendees registering but not turning up on the day (25.06.12). She felt that giving the course a monetary value would ensure that people gave more thought when signing up and would be more likely to attend. So far results were positive. To ensure accessibility, the costs were low and there was a sliding scale, depending on ability to pay, or payment via the Haringey Timebank scheme, which meant one could swap volunteer hours for training hours.

The courses ran on a combination of weekdays and weekends. They were promoted locally, across the Borough Network and to mental health charities. I noted that attendance included familiar faces from the project and neighbouring groups, mixed with newcomers. Some had travelled a considerable distance to attend due to their interest in permaculture and urban forest gardening (subjects that underpinned all the sessions), and the group's reputation in the field.

Each course lasted for three to four hours and always included lunch. Sessions started with introductions and the serving of herbal teas to begin the process of sensing local food. The training incorporated traditional demonstrations, such as explanations of taxonomical drawings alongside real examples, and using interactive techniques like guessing plant varieties. A site visit and explanation of the show-bed were also crucial; to put our knowledge into practice and see plants *in situ*. Throughout we were encouraged to look, feel, smell and taste, which was both fun and impactful. We collected a salad for lunch and followed the same process as volunteer days, though attendees were not expected to contribute food. Lunch was an opportunity for further education, albeit more informally. The chatter in the group also revealed the wide-ranging motivations for attendance; from the inexperienced through to those who had extensive technical knowledge, those looking for skills for work, or for home growing. All attending expressed their enjoyment of the sessions. As they were paid for, the bar of expectation was inevitably set high, and the format was intensive, fun, and created lasting impacts. I, and others whom I met again later, could recall a great deal of the detail. I concluded this was in part due to ongoing use of some of the skills, but also the effectiveness of the training format and the multi-sensory performances.

Grafting particularly stuck in my mind, and others concurred, citing the novelty of the technical process, using knives (dangerous) and the special grafting cutter (less so), and



correctly binding the cuttings together so they would successfully grow. This was trickier than it looked, and we were shown several failed efforts. Grafting represented clever management of nature; by adding more flavoursome fruit varieties to established trees. The explanation of family trees — which can house multiple varieties of a single fruit (such as apples or pears) and also 'fruit-salad trees' such as plums, nectarines and peaches — was inspiring. We were all fascinated by Amy's stealthy interventions in the public landscape to be more productive in forthcoming seasons and for future generations. These were conducted during foraging walks, which I attended later in the year.

### **The impacts of my involvement**

I found that the sensorial aspect, combined with the discursive element of learning about food, meant that it had a more significant impact, and I recalled it more effectively later on. We were asked to concentrate on identifying the smells, textures, and tastes of the ingredients. It was fun. Combined with influences from the other food groups, I noted a gradual influence on a range of practices. My eating habits changed, with more vegetarian meals, my awareness of the geographical source of food increased, and even how food was packaged, which was rarely discussed but naturally influenced through the bundle of practices involved in food consumption (Schatzki 2011).

Culturally, there was a *quid pro quo*; the hard work of volunteers in exchange for delicious and educational food — itself the result of thought and effort. Individual hard work was satisfying. Combined efforts meant that dramatic visual shifts in project progression accompanied the intensity of the experience. Though the activities and culture was different to the Energy group, there was also a level of order and professionalism within the group and a similar combination of experimentation (forest gardening) and support. My experience with this group highlighted the amount of hard work, planning, management, and competence needed to successfully propagate the project (discussed further in chapter 7). At the same time, the fundamental principles of 'forest gardening', permaculture and their application to the urban setting were inspirational. We imagined a future of a minimal-effort, self-sufficient food-production landscape in parks across cities throughout the country.

It also emphasised that skills are sometimes re-awakened; I often heard phrases such as 'my grandmother used to grow this', and reflection on how older generations were

skilled in these practices and yet we had lost the competence (Shove et al. 2012). Supported collaborative learning — in both volunteer days and training sessions — through embodied material practice, and using all the senses, quickly established new competence. Importantly, it was effectively retained.

## 6.4 The Foraging group

I attended the monthly Foraging group events alongside volunteer days at the food-related projects. The Foraging group was a 'free, informal network based in North London for people interested in picking fruit and other local food' (Foraging group 2011). The network was set up in 2009, held free events between 2010 and 2015, and was still active online at the time of writing in 2018. The group concentrated solely on urban foraging and was, by design, an informal group without funding, formal roles, or formal membership. The group's principles were to:

Enjoy ourselves. Refuse<sup>20</sup> before reuse before recycle before landfill. No disposables. Although we're not all vegan, please respect the sensibilities of those who are. So we forage for nuts, but not squirrels (Foraging group 2011).

The nature of foraging means that each group experience was spatially unique as the subject, location, and format of the event differed each month. Natasha explained that the subject of each walk or event was season-dependent (15.06.12). The monthly schedule (Table 5) was published on the website and reminders were sent to the group via email, and to followers of the twitter handle.

**Table 5: Foraging group's events 2011-2012.**

Subject	Date
Harvesting fruit	Aug-11
Apple picking and pressing at Well-Oiled Festival N4	Sep-11
Apple Day Celebration	Oct-11
Winter salad hunting	Nov-11
Potluck party	Dec-11
Winter salad challenge at Edible Landscapes London	Jan-12
Know your Alliums at Stroud Green Library	Feb-12
Nettle Celebration at Green Lens Studios	Mar-12
Spring foraging on the Parkland Walk	Apr-12
Elderflowers	May-12
Edible Flower celebration with floral cocktails	Jun-12
Cherry-plum picking at Tottenham Marshes	Jul-12

<sup>20</sup> By which they meant prioritise refusing packaging, then reuse it, then recycle it.

All the events were located within Haringey, in a combination of green spaces, community buildings, and integrated within other community events. Sightings of produce in season directed the locations and they made efforts to ensure events were held around the borough in easily accessible places. Celebrations, such as the network Christmas party, were kindly hosted by more active members in their homes.

### **Learning how to forage**

The group's activities were centred on individual learning through communal foraging. Whilst the focus was on foraging, there was also discussion of how we could reduce food miles and limit packaging waste. Individual practice change came from the experiential aspects of foraging and food through its consumption, and learning about preparation, preserving, and locally sourced alternatives.

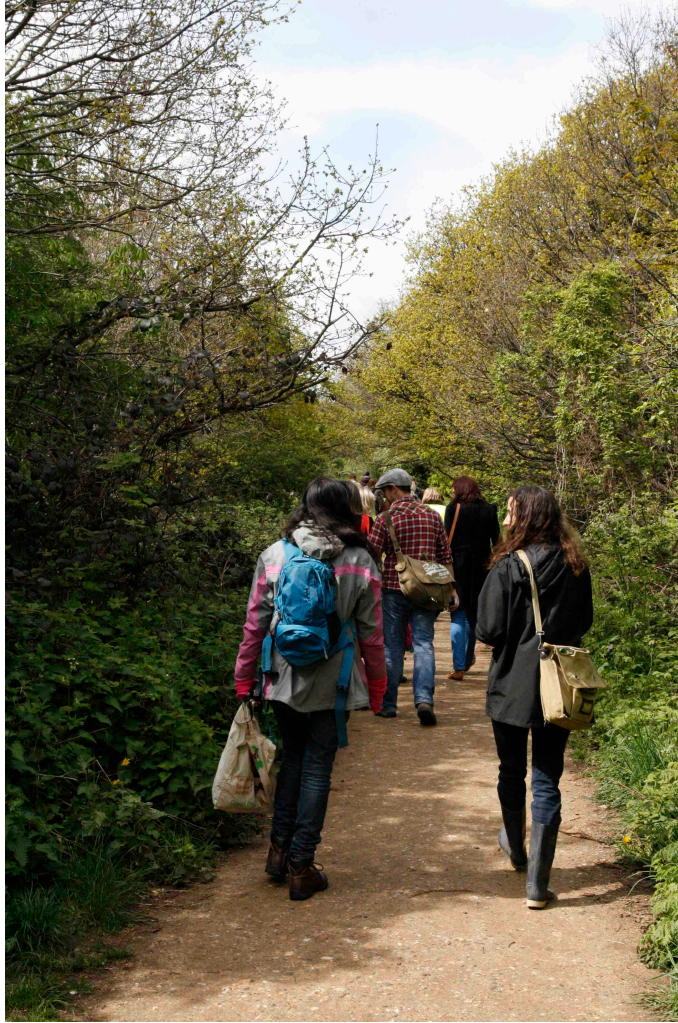
I had been introduced to the group in a multiplicity of ways. Borough Network members talked about the group fondly. I also encountered it through experiential engagements (discussed in 5.1). I was completely inexperienced and foraging required strong plant identification skills to select edible plants safely. My competence was lacking, which made the events and group sound particularly beneficial and exciting. The events were on the third Saturday of each month at 1 pm, which was easy to remember and schedule in the diary. Each event required movement to a new place, researching the public transport links, finding the location and meeting the others from the group. There were two event formats — outside on a foraging walk or inside a community venue. Each was led by two or three of the expert core group, although they actively encouraged others with knowledge, which was usually several of those present, to contribute, and for the regulars to bring dishes to taste.

This variety in topic and location had a particular effect; each event felt like an adventure. Attending involved exploring a new place and was a great way of visiting new parts of the borough with which I was unfamiliar. There were new people to meet and new things to taste. Others concurred (IDs). Alongside the educational benefit, all those I spoke to expressed their enjoyment, which in turn explained why they returned.

The walks occurred in relatively unmanaged green space such as the Parkland Walk (a disused railway running between Finsbury Park and Highgate) and Tottenham Marshes (covering 100 acres in the Lee Valley). I was excited about attending the first walk as

the group's reputation preceded them. My first walk was a revelation: I saw the space I regularly walked through in a new light. Over time, the walks resulted in seeing nature as bountiful and in an increasingly understood list of available 'ingredients'. We ambled, stopping periodically when one of the experts would explain how to identify a plant, demonstrate how to gather them, and discuss how to prepare or preserve them. We chatted amiably as we walked, falling into step with someone, stopping for an educational few minutes, and then chatting with someone else. Often other users of the public space would stop to listen in. As we walked, we learned about the issues facing the space — such as Japanese knotweed encroaching on the Parkland Walk. We picked up stray rubbish and moaned about dog owners. Dave pointed out the evidence of foragers before us being too greedy, warning us not to pick too much so as not to disrupt the ecosystem we were benefiting from. The walks were enlightening and good fun, and everyone went home with a substantial haul.

The event culminated in a picnic lunch, sitting on picnic mats and sharing the food, as shown in Figure 10. The rules included 'no disposables'. The more organised had the full set of a plastic cup, plate, cutlery, with water in reusable bottles and the less organised made do with tissues as plates. I became better equipped as time progressed. Amy brought several homemade dishes including at least two with the topical ingredient. She took time, just as at the Urban Food group, to explain each ingredient and her efforts to use local or UK-grown variants. I noted that many brought food relevant to the subject of the walk, or other event topics, such as fruit cheese, jams and preserves. Contributions were usually vegan inline with the dietary preference of the event leaders.



**Setting off for a walk**



**Fruits of the foraging**

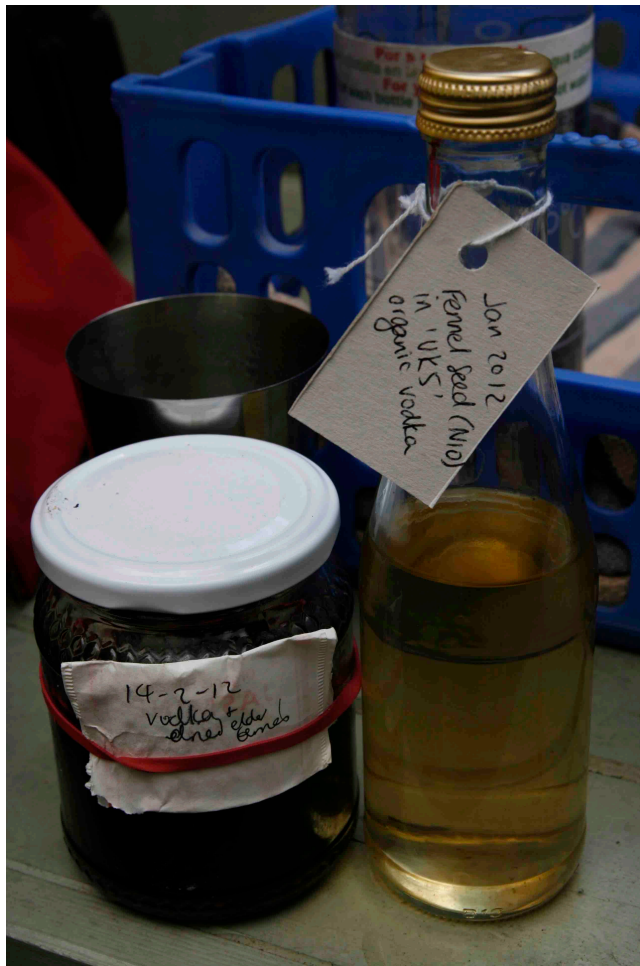




**Grafting**



**Dishes using foraged nettles for tasting at an indoor event**



**Cocktails made from foraged produce**

**Figure 10: Photos of a Foraging group walk, grafting, dishes to taste at an indoor event and cocktails.**

The indoor events had a different ambience, shown in Figure 10. We were contained and warm in a community space, and the facilities meant that it was easier to showcase hot food and drinks. At the nettle event, a large table housed nettle soup, nettle curry, various nettle dips, nettle tea, and accompanying dishes such as crackers made from local acorns and dried fruit crisps. At the first event, I made the mistake of eating before I set off. Subsequently, I went with an empty stomach, in expectation of a feast of enjoyable dishes to sample. Others noted the dishes were always tasty and interesting. Alongside the main ingredient, there was a fun process of smelling and tasting to try and identify the other foraged ingredients. This practice distinguished those with more foraging skill and helped us expand our knowledge.

A core member introduced the event, the group and the topic. The chefs would each explain their dishes. Amy updated us on her journey of promoting local food and reducing food miles. Having proven UK-grown variants of pulses, beans and even sugar

could be used to make tasty local versions of dishes; she started trying to source a wider range of ingredients directly from UK suppliers. She had success over time, and members later had the opportunity to place orders with her so she could bulk buy. They would subsequently collect from her home in Tupperware or glass jars.

There was a demonstration of how to weave using treated nettles, and written information on the plant, such as taxonomic details, and its traditional and modern uses. It was striking how often there were 'lost' practices that still resonated and could be used today. The format meant there was more time and proximity for socialising, which I increasingly enjoyed as I got to know more people present. The sensorial aspect of trying the food and engaging in unusual new practices provided common discursive ground, and therefore a means to engage more easily with new people. The innovative cocktails, elderflower champagne, and locally brewed beer helped the relaxed atmosphere.

As the locations were fixed, people tended to come and go at different times lending a more casual feel. Conversely, there was considerable care and effort that went into arranging and catering the events. They offered an opportunity to learn about a topic in more detail, and spend more time tasting a variety of dishes and learning to prepare them. On the one hand, they were not quite as memorable as the adventures outside: inside events still felt 'alternative', but not as intrepid. On the other hand, they were where the social networks bloomed.

The group used digital communications to promote the events. The framing of foraging was very factual: the practices involved and the experimental side of eating and recipes. There was little emotive language. I was surprised, as I had formed a perception of the group as being the most 'alternative' form of environmental mobilisation. Those sending out the communications were already experts and these activities were second nature to them. The discursive tone also reflected the character of the core members of the network and the aims of integrating foraging within urban sustainability. However, I always felt a sense of anticipation and adventure, both as a newcomer and also when more involved, despite the discourse used.

### **Performing the group beyond the monthly events**

The online community and *ad hoc* foraging meet-ups were essential for the group, particularly as the events were limited to once per month. As highlighted in 5.3, the



Foraging group was the only group to use a self-managed listserv email, which facilitated its virtual manifestation. The online network succeeded as all members could ask questions about food, how to prepare or preserve, share their skills, and ask to borrow or offer materials and technology. The e-conversations flowed due to the active participation of those with skills offering their support alongside the core group members. Members highlighted how the inclusive discussion and collaboration helped them feel more involved with the group (IDs). I found the ongoing group interaction contributed to the gradual shift in impacts on my food-practices.

The listserv also fuelled the frequent ad-hoc gatherings, typically to gather ripe fruit on trees either in public spaces or gardens. For private gardens, there was a strict procedure followed to make arrangements with the owners. First pickings were offered to the homeowner and then the foragers shared the remaining fruit. Someone would email round a sighting or arrangement with a homeowner and formulate a plan for those who could attend to meet up. I joined a meet-up to gather cherries. The tree was one of the few, Amy explained, that was edible rather than ornamental (ID), bemoaning the idiocy of planting such varieties when they created just as much mess, if not more, as no one could harvest them.

### **Inter-group links and activities beyond the group**

The Foraging group was the group that appeared most frequently at other events and within other groups' spaces. This had several beneficial effects: experiential engagement with newcomers (as discussed in 5.1), and interaction with members of the network beyond the monthly events. It helped with the group's reputation-building, and also in building awareness of foraging and the wider food-consumption practice bundle of local food, food miles, and packaging (Schatzki 2011).

This appearance was at the individual level, with several core members contributing skills in permaculture and forest gardening resources to other groups. These were social networks across the groups offering support where required. These individuals were also highly committed to the local-sustainable-food cause and had time to donate to more than one group to further it. Thus, shared aims resulted in the movement of competence, person-power, and material resources — greatly benefiting the other groups by building group capacity (Middlemiss & Parrish 2009). It also positively impacted the 'butterflies' (a term used in the Transition group training), who expressed how they enjoyed helping projects and being involved in multiple groups to further the

cause through a form of persistent, experiential activism. Practice performance commonly overlapped with the Urban Food group. On one foraging walk, with a few of us in attendance who had also completed the Urban Food grafting training session, we grafted 'in the wild'. Using the cutting machine on the walk was harder as the branches were higher up than when we practiced using twigs while sitting down. I also felt more responsibility to get it right, given we were endeavouring to benefit the community. Despite our noble aims, we found a secluded space to start. We were not hidden, but I sensed it was easier to locate ourselves somewhere we were less likely to be asked to explain our actions to other users of the space. Making future bounty more abundant was immensely satisfying, despite not being able to see the outcomes due to the timeframes involved. Amy claimed she would remember (ID), but I doubted whether one would be able to track down the exact spot once the binding holding the ends together had fallen off and before the fruits of our labour had taken effect. This created an invisible, gradual, but potentially very impactful effect on the public urban environment and systems of provision (Eizenberg 2004, Shove and Walker 2010)

This appearance across groups also occurred at the more formal group level. A Foraging group branded stall, with dishes and drinks to taste, and information about the group appeared within other groups' events. This was a means of engaging with wider publics and Amy's cocktails were a firm favourite. As highlighted in 6.2, the Foraging group appeared at events hosted by the Nurture group, at the launch event of our local Transition group, at the Borough Network, and other community events.

The Foraging group's aims and activities lent themselves to creating attractive sensorial engagements: through food, drink, and tasting. Furthermore, community events benefit from catering which helps fuel the social time within them. Therefore, Amy's innovative dishes and exciting foraged cocktails were the perfect impactful, sustainability-related solution. Their appearance generated a talking point, was fun, and reflected positively on the host project. As the group was uniquely focused on Foraging, and moved across the borough, they did not clash with the groups they appeared alongside in either physical or topical territory.

### **The impacts of my involvement**

All those I spoke to at the Foraging engagements had a wider interest in other food-related practices. I gauged that I was frequently the least 'green fingered' attendee, due to my atypical researcher-journey amongst the local groups. For others, their skills

ranged from home food-growing through to expert foragers — all keen to expand their knowledge. The impacts of involvement were, from a sustainable-practice change perspective, hard to separate from their other interests. For me, it was bound together (in part as the groups were also bound together) with Urban Food in particular. Thus I experienced shifts in different aspects of the food-consumption practice-bundle (Schatzki 2011): growing, recipes, buying, and efforts to minimise waste. Others noted similar shifts.

My perception of the natural environment shifted; an impact similar to the Energy group's effect on how I saw the built environment. It was rendered more productive as I looked for potential — this time for edible plants, plantable spaces or trees that could be grafted upon to benefit future seasons. This shift in perception was immediate. It was due to being outside, immersed and moving through that environment, and actively observing it during the group's walks. The practices of tasting, smelling, and touching, alongside explanations from experts, was impactful. The innate qualities of foraging allowed for a greater focus on my sensorial experience. It is a physical embodied act. However, by its very nature it does not require the preparation and ongoing maintenance of, for example, the Urban Food growing space. There was more time to listen, absorb, explore, taste, enjoy, and discuss — practices encouraged by the group.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on the practices of mobilisation that groups perform together, describing my ethnographic experiences of participation with each one. Chapter 4 explored motivations and characterised the grassroots sustainability groups as a form of inclusive environmentalism: the mobilisation of practice-change-oriented aims, performances, and performers. Chapter 5 explained the journeys of participation from initial engagement, through enrolment, to involvement, and, for some, exit. It drew attention to the mobilisation practices at each stage, and I explained how participation involved supported experimentation, with that support being provided by the group.

In this chapter, I lingered with each of the four groups, providing a more nuanced understanding of *how* they provided support. This builds on the current focus on the benefits of single types of groups (as discussed in 2.1), by exploring the groups' mobilisation practices identified in chapters 4 and 5. By drawing in and out the focus of

analysis, I identified common practices-as-entity that are crucial for mobilisation and delved into the similarities and differences of the practices-as-performances, which create the unique cultures in the neighbouring groups (Shove et al. 2012).

All groups performed convivial sustainability through embodying practice change. They provide opportunities for participants that are characterised by five shared features:

- Inspirational, successful projects, with participants with shared aims.
- Easy access to friendly expertise and reciprocal learning.
- Protected space and time for supported experimentation.
- Communal experiential opportunities.
- Welcomes, social time, celebrations and shared food.

These ingredients, created through shared practice-as-entities, appeared in all the groups, building their ‘groupiness’ and success (Shove et al. 2012, Forsyth 2018). The details of the practice-as-performances were culturally unique in each, and were performed to greater or lesser mobilisation-effects.

These ingredients helped achieve individuals’ motivations, support their experimentation, and created a sociable environment to which people wanted to return. As described, mobilisation was amplified by the atmospheres the group creates — of innovation and of being with like-minded people — and through the activation of senses and emotions (Valtonen 2009, Jasper 2010). In each group, there was a (differing) balance of learning and fun. Importantly, there was also a mix of the familiar and unfamiliar, which shifted as competences changed and practices became routinised, whilst new topics were explored, new places were visited, new people attended, and projects developed.

I also set out to identify practices that hinder mobilisation when the group is together. The short answer to this is that the helpful practices, when they were omitted, became a hindrance by their absence. The initial experience newcomers had with a group was critical. The lack of a tour or explanation of activities, or opportunity to assess a fit with the other participants, could result in a swift exit. These were practices that the Transition group development training recommends groups formalise into their activities and structures (discussed further in chapter 7).

As my ethnographic descriptions illustrated, the performance of the ingredients differs in each group, creating group-specific cultures. These performances were co-

constitutive with the aims, competences, and capacities of each group (Middlemiss and Parrish 2009, Shove et al. 2012). I believe that the same ingredients, though differently performed, would be found in other successful groups. Resources were crucial determinants: materials, finances and, importantly, the participants themselves as contributors to the group — ranging from hard-working volunteers to engaged listeners. Martin (2013) draws attention to the socio-spatial relations produced by and in mobilisation. As described, the project spaces — their permanence, mobility to and through, their layout and relation with the outside world, how they change — all created unique characteristics. The groups all aimed to change space: amending the built environment (Energy), public green space (Foraging), seeding space (Urban Food) to recreating wilderness (Nurture). They made space, and challenge participants to see space as more productive. The dramaturgical effects of how space and time were harnessed — particularly in the rituals around celebration, social time, and food — were highly influential on culture and individuals' experiences and connection with the group. Reciprocal food sharing, in particular, was vital in all groups, though the rituals surrounding it varied (Belk 2010).

Each group shapes the ingredients through performance for particular effects. The Energy group created experiential activities, and rendered energy more visible, through re-creating home-like experiences by asking members to host workshops, and increasingly injecting social time into formal lectures. The Nurture group re-created a microcosm of the resilient community; combining home comforts, relaxation and work in an ever-changing oasis in the city. The Urban Food group merged hard work and celebration of food into every meal. The Foraging group's seasonal events and network structure meant the virtual community was essential for mobilisation by creating belonging, support, and arranging face-to-face encounters. These were the convivial spaces of engagement and contention created by and within the groups as part of the wider environmental movement (Cox 1998, Martin 2013).

At the individual level, there were similarities in impacts of involvement. The impacts were on the communal end of the spectrum and centred on enjoyment, deepening social networks, and building an ongoing willingness to contribute. The social journey was complex with some (such as myself) eager to belong through interpersonal encounters, finding increasing comfort over time. Some, however, were happy to contribute more independently. Crucially, the groups facilitated both patterns. At the individual end of the spectrum, participants were learning (communally), and gradually shifting their

practices (Bradbury and Middlemiss 2014). There were also wider effects on related practices, frequently not the initial motivation for joining. This was in part due to the projects' growth (the Nurture and Urban Food groups) or topics covered (the Energy and Foraging groups), the expertise and passions of collaborators, discussions during social time, and the gradual shift in personal interests.

All four groups were still active at the time of writing in 2018, demonstrating their longevity. I argue that this is precisely because they all included these ingredients. For existing groups to develop, or for new groups to take root, this detailed understanding of both the recognisable practice-as-entity across groups, and the subtle differences in practice-as-performance between them, could help groups consider how seemingly small details can have a considerable impact on mobilisation effects. To achieve this longevity of the groups, there is substantial work behind the scenes, to which I turn attention in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7 Leading mobilisation

In this chapter, **Leading mobilisation**, I primarily address the third research question: **how do grassroots sustainability groups mobilise beyond the group?** Through the ethnography, I explore the practices of leadership, how groups reach out and engage with wider publics, and their place in broader networks.

Initially, I considered how practices engage new publics and the networking and collaborations that extend the influence of the groups. During research design in 2011, I imagined the associated management practices that are important in these mobilisation practices, and wondered whether they were akin to or different from management practices I was familiar with in companies. However, after starting a family (during which time I had remained in touch with the groups) and returning to analysis (and completing the thesis in 2018), a more perceptive insight emerged.

The groups' longevity led to my appreciation that it is leadership — as both qualities of individuals and a set of leadership practices — that supports the groups. Thus, it became clear that understanding leadership-as-practice also contributes insight to the other questions: **how and why are people participating?** and: **what are the groups' practices of mobilisation?** I realised that, rather than simply exploring management, I had explored how and why core members lead, how leaders inspire other members, and how the groups are managed through a range of leadership practices that are performed in particular cultural ways.

In this chapter I explore leadership as a practice-bundle. I consider the co-practitioners involved in the social construction of leadership: the leaders themselves, the core groups, and those who bestow upon them their leadership status, both within and beyond the group. Turning to the groups' place in wider networks and scales of activity, here the distinctions elucidated by Cox (1998), in his discussion of local politics, are useful. He distinguishes the localised social relations that create spaces of dependence from the spaces of engagement, 'the space in which the politics of securing a space of dependence unfolds' (1998:2), which may, or may not, be at other scales. Applying this to the groups, I explored how the groups' leadership practices were mobilising internally (creating the space of dependence), and how the practices of reaching out were implicated in spaces of engagement. In this ethnography, these engagement spaces are related to particular jurisdictional scales (ibid.) discursively claimed by the

organisations involved: local collaborations, the Borough Network, national Low Carbon Communities Network (LCCN), and the international Transition Movement. I examined the role that the groups play in the spaces of dependence those collaborative partners and networks are striving to create.

This consideration of scale and action is where the bundles and constellations of Schatzki (2011), discussed in 2.2, came into view. The groups perform a bundle of leadership practices which have the shared aim of continuing the momentum and mobilisation of the groups, but are also entwined in the relationships of these other network organisations (by which I mean both the groups within the network and the team managing the network itself). Put simply; group practices are also part of the bundle of practices being performed elsewhere with differing aims.

At a more detailed level, leadership practices require certain kinds of practitioners, particular competences and material resources. Their ongoing task is to create a stable equilibrium of group experimentation with the support of participants with a range of competences, which successfully drives group progress. Leadership is pivotal within group culture and therefore within the practice change and supported-experimentation focus, and the convivial nature of the groups, described in previous chapters. Leadership is the final essential ingredient of mobilisation, and this chapter establishes how it is characterised within these groups. Once again, I compare the recognisable leadership practice-as-entities, alongside unique leadership practice-as-performances across the groups (Shove et al. 2012).

In the practitioners' guide, the Transition Handbook, Hopkins (2008b) recommends using formal structures (such as not-for-profit organisations), constitutions, and collaborating with the local council, and explains the guiding and supportive role of the Transition Network. Academic literature examining single types of grassroots sustainability groups highlights aspects of governance and management particular to these types of groups. For energy groups, considering community benefits and ownership models as a way of increasing support is advocated (for example, Walker and Devine-Wright 2008). Social movement literature draws attention to strategies for mobilising resources, using political opportunities and leveraging the cultural aspects of movements (see, for example, Bate et al. 2004 and Seyfang and Haxeltine 2010). The crucial role of networking within social movements is highlighted (Diani 1992, Diani and McAdam 2003), so much so that recent work argues that the environmental



movement is more fruitfully considered a network than a movement (Saunders 2013).

Within these discussions, there is a tendency to examine leadership in a particular way. The role of leaders is understudied (Bate et al. 2004). Where leadership is examined, the focus tends to be on leaders' charismatic traits, or on personality issues and leadership clashes (Morris and Staggenborg 2007). This is important, as the leaders of these groups remained (at the time of writing) the leaders eight years on. They shared common characteristics. Exploring what they did, and the wider leadership structures and practices, was also crucial to understanding the longevity of these groups. Middlemiss and Parrish (2009) identify that personal, organisational, and cultural capacity must be present, as grassroots initiatives draw on this capacity to break current social boundaries, thereby creating new capacity for social change. I argue that it is leadership-as-practice, performed in particular ways in these groups, which successfully draws upon and, crucially, builds these forms of capacity (locally and within the wider networks discussed above). This chapter brings a more nuanced understanding of the practices of leadership and their underpinning of the mobilisation of grassroots sustainability groups.

Here I discuss materials from the temporally-extended ethnography. They predominantly come from participant observation, the twenty-five participant interviews, and a multitude of informal discussions — particularly about governance, research, and training. Reflecting on fieldwork, I note that, whilst these methods enabled a high level of insight into the day-to-day workings of the groups, they were nevertheless limited by both access and logistics, which differed across the groups. Therefore, the observations made here about leadership-as-practice are not intended to be exhaustive.

### **Structure of the chapter**

Leaders and Leadership, 7.1, explains the importance of understanding leaders as an extended group of performers (leaders, core groups, and the wider group), and leadership as a social construction within groups. Characterisations of the attributes and interpersonal relations, particularly between the leader and the core group, are made across the groups.

Leadership practice within the groups, 7.2, establishes the differing leadership structures and procedures used internally by each group. I explore the practices of member

management and communications, and discuss the practices of group development and understanding effectiveness, to which the groups give less attention.

Extending leadership beyond the group, 7.3, discusses the common leadership practices of informal networking and collaborative working, which secure resources for the groups and build their reputation. This includes informal practices both within the group, and beyond with other neighbouring groups.

Practicing networking at different scales, 7.4, examines how leadership ensures the groups thrive through formal networking practices, and how groups contribute to those networks. These are the local Borough Network, the national LCCN and the international Transition Network.

Practicing collaborations, 7.5, focuses on formal collaborative projects as a leadership practice. I discuss the Energy group's collaboration with Haringey Council in the Low Carbon Zone (LCZ) and the Low Carbon Communities Challenge (LCCC).

## **7.1 Leaders and leadership**

Before examining the details of the leadership practices performed in groups, here I discuss the benefit of the practice lens. It brings understanding that leadership is a social construction within these groups; conveyed by the leaders, core groups, members, collaborative and networking partners, and beyond. Looking at practices helps us to understand how leadership succeeds in a sector that is characterised by volunteers and conviviality, but also innovation and progress. In short, it helps us understand how the groups succeed without the hierarchies, funds, and formality of other sectors, such as commercial firms and formal volunteering organisations.

### **Understanding leadership as practice**

The practice lens brings attention to leadership as a practice-bundle, with a range of practitioners involved, and differing performances (and combinations of practices) in each group. It also brings attention to the aims of leadership practices, their competences, and their materialities. Leadership practices and styles are co-constitutive of the groups' goals and culture, and therefore affect the mobilisation of the leaders themselves, the other practitioners, resources, and materials.

The groups ranged in leadership structure and style. As highlighted in 6.1, the Energy group was characterised, by themselves and others, as being professionally structured, with elected roles similar to those found in professional organisations. At the other end of the spectrum was the Foraging group, which described itself as an informal network. However, I noticed similarities that explained why all the groups were successful, alongside differences, which characterise their cultures. The key insights were the common characteristics of leaders and their working relationships with their core group.

### **Practitioners of leadership**

I observed some shared characteristics of the leaders. These were co-constitutive to the culture and aims of the groups. Their leadership style was collaborative. They were passionate experts, not only leaders of the group but also within their respective fields. However, they were aware of their limitations, and always invited expertise from other members. They were familiar with their group and sector, which meant they always knew whom to ask about particular topics or for more information. The core group supported them, and members were invited to contribute in any way they could.

As leaders, they were accessible and patient in answering queries from practitioners of different competence levels. I noted they were all skilled at reading their audience, explaining clearly, and using demonstrations (and invoking the senses through touch and taste) as much as possible, which was engaging, facilitated learning, and encouraged questions. The members were all complimentary about the leaders; noting their dedication, expertise, and approachability. They were all calm and respectful, and clear on the groups' aims which were practice change and progress driven. This created an atmosphere of people knowing what to expect and what was expected of them. Other members could explain the aims and projects to me, the exception being the Energy group, where the wider membership had more of a partial perspective, explained through their partial participation in the wide range of group activities.

The leaders greatly contributed to the group being characterised by a mix of learning and conviviality; these rituals were instigated and encouraged by the leaders. They were also deft at managing the pace and mood of the groups — whilst there was pressure on resources, which helped with momentum and innovation, there were no crises, or dramatic resignations of members and they continued to attract newcomers. They were skilled at networking — both informally and formally. In terms of their backgrounds,

they all had expertise in the groups' area of activity, had experience of community organising, and had time to commit consistently to their efforts.

The core group members conveyed leadership through their tacit acknowledgement of their leader's status, and through their collaborative participation in the performance of leadership practices particular to the group culture. Whilst the degree of formality of the core group in each group differed, a small cadre of the most active members supported each leader. The size of this cadre was aligned with the complexity of the activities, with the Energy group having the largest and most formal. These members were the powerhouse of the group, helping the leader and ensuring these groups did not suffer burnout (discussed in Exits 5.4). The core members often had a specific skill (either technical or leadership-practice related) or group-experience, which they contributed to the overall project. They were familiar faces at project events, or in online conversations, and were also accessible for others to ask questions of, as they were more skilled and knowledgeable than many of the wider group.

Camaraderie characterised the working relationship between the leaders and their core. It was good-natured and patient. Relationships went beyond the confines of the group. I felt that there was an underlying understanding and mutual appreciation that all involved were volunteering time and energy. I saw situations that might, in other contexts, result in a more heated response, which were calmly and collaboratively defused. Interviewees were careful not to overreact in the group setting. I noted that those with a formal role were more empowered to give direction to the group, or complain if the issue was within their remit.

Core group roles are an area that can present problems for groups, as there is a fine balance as to when formality is desirable, or perhaps required. The groups at the ends of the spectrum of organisational and project complexity faced fewer issues. The Energy group, with complex projects and collaborations (discussed later), required considerable support and so formal roles were essential (Louise and Paul IDs). The Foraging group, with focused activities and an online support network, was reasonably self-managing. So much so, the leaders were self-deprecating about their leadership status (Amy and Dave IDs).

The Nurture group, however, showed the occasional tension. In part, it was due to the requirement of professional input, and in part due to the divergent project aims of the

building and growing. These put pressure on resources, and there were questions of responsibility. It struck me that more formal processes and roles might have been beneficial in this instance, as it would have been clear who should be asked to work on particular tasks. However, with formality come specific practices and expectations, thus influencing the culture of the group. Lucy explained the challenge for leadership; to balance the requirements of increasingly complex activities (and requirements of resources) with the innate culture of the group — attractive, as it was, to the group's membership (IDs).

### **Becoming a leader**

Another aspect of structure and formality is in explaining how leaders become leaders. These leaders are, with one exception, the same today as they were when I first came into contact with the groups. The exception is that of the Energy group where the chair stepped aside (after my MSc research in 2010), and a new chair was unanimously voted in. The formal structure meant that the process was transparent. The ex-chair had new project interests, and there had been a degree of informal succession planning (Paul IDs).

The core group members had their areas of expertise and gave as much time as they could to the projects. They had gradually built their role over time, or had stood for election in the case of the Energy group. In the latter, the elections went uncontested. Partly, this was because the process was widely discussed before the event - and so it was well known who was volunteering to take a role on - and partly because there was not an excess of unused capacity available, with competition for roles. There was a sense of relief, that someone actively wanted the role, and that the person stepping down was finally able to pass on the mantle (Energy IDs).

I did not see any sign of efforts to take over the leadership, or a supporting core role. I conclude that this was due to several factors. The leaders (apart from Energy) started the groups, and so, whilst they were welcoming of support, a change in leadership would have been quite radical, particularly without an official mechanism. The leaders and leadership (and motivation for joining) were centred on action and not ego, and the leaders were likeable and experts in their field - a combination of qualities hard to replace. Finally, they were successful project managers and the groups were characterised by a lack of internal politics. Even in the Transition group, which was suffering from a dearth of core group support, the leader was sanguine about keeping

options open, and gradually rebuilding the core group (Emma 25.06.12).

### **Finding a role**

I observed untaken opportunities for members to offer skills and take on particular leadership practices that, in turn, might eventually lead to personnel changes and succession planning. Ten years is a long time to lead a project, so it was interesting that there was little attention to this element.

During the Transition group training, we discussed the efficiencies, or lack thereof, of wider group contribution to leadership practices. There were common complaints of not enough support; of the leader — or core group — doing all the work. The trainer said this was common in groups. This pattern can be explained by the lack of resource planning, and of understanding the resources available in the group. Often groups 'just managed' — the usual suspects would contribute and overcome challenges. However, this raised the question for all attending of what groups could achieve, and what would the experience be like for leaders and core group members if greater resources were available.

Discussing pathways to participation revealed that core group members often become so simply by being regulars, volunteering for something which then conveyed a 'usual suspect' status on them, in all groups. There was no process — formal or informal — for understanding why someone was joining, what they wanted to get from their participation, and the skills they could bring. In part, there is a disjuncture as those joining groups are in the mind-set of practice change and learning about sustainability — and not necessarily teaching and contributing to the less visible practices, of which they may not be aware.

When I brought this issue up with some of the groups, they readily agreed it was an area they could improve. Both Louise and Lucy explained that they could see it required a dedicated role — a 'buddy' or 'mentor' who could, alongside the welcome tour, check in and see how newcomers were settling and what they wanted/could offer (IDs). They felt this would ensure they were matching motivations and adding resources to the group, ensuring that the leadership was well supported.

## 7.2 Leadership practice within the groups

7.1 highlighted the similarities in leadership characteristics, and how leaders and core groups worked together. There were also differences in leadership structure and culture, aligned with the aims of the group. The grassroots sustainability groups were supported in their mobilisation through specific leadership practices, which mobilised the leaders, core group, membership, and beyond. Practices included leader/core engagement (discussed in 7.1), member management, and communications practices. Here I discuss these last two, and two leadership practices that were lacking.

### Leadership practices in action

The first practices are managing members and decision-making. Much of the work of social networking and talking about the projects, tasks, and required support, was done during the social time at the projects. There was also a requirement for more formal opportunities to make decisions, further the projects, and discuss funding, resources and new ideas. These differed in performance.

For the Foraging group and the Borough Network, this conversation continued through the listserv, which provided a forum for discussion. This sufficed for the Foraging group, alongside the leadership discussions within the small core group, as the requirements of the group were relatively limited by design. For the Borough Network, this form of discussion was the logical solution to the network format, with groups in different geographic locations. A small core group who made decisions at quarterly get-togethers coordinated this activity. The process was straightforward with an agenda, decision-making through quorum attendance and voting, which was then circulated to the network. Again, the activities of the network were relatively straightforward, with quarterly events and working groups, which acted somewhat like independent projects coordinated by their own leaders, who reported back to the network on their progress.

The international Transition model is collaborative and networked by design, with a core group that consists of at least one representative for each of the individual projects, working on areas such as energy, food, and transport (Hopkins 2008b). In theory, each group works relatively independently toward an energy-descent plan<sup>21</sup> with each constituent project managing its own resources and progress, calling on the rest of the

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<sup>21</sup> The plan the group develops to deal with reducing availability of oil, covering alternative energy, health, education and economy.

group for support as required. As previously described in 6.3, the Urban Food group was the most active within the Transition group. It acted as a solid base of communal activity, whilst the new core group, with the encouraging of Emma, were developing fledgling projects. At the Urban Food and Nurture groups, there was a bi-weekly opportunity to discuss the progress of projects during the volunteering days. The nature of the projects required reactivity to the seasons and current growing conditions. The volunteers were organised by the leaders depending on the to-do list that day, with some also asking to help with particular tasks to further their learning. More substantive projects, such as building initiatives, were discussed during the social time. I had less visibility of the workings of the Nurture group, which required more management, due to the combination of growing and cob-building projects. Formal business was conducted in a similar way to the Energy group, with minuted meetings, but without the same level of formality or formal roles (IDs).

The Energy group was formal in leadership structure and was the only group with a paid membership. Their practice-change-related activities had less regular opportunities for discussions. Resultantly, there were formal meetings in the form of planning sessions and an annual general meeting (AGM). Each also included time for socialising and celebrating successes. The AGM was similar in format to a business meeting, with a chair leading the proceedings, minutes recorded, and decisions taken and circulated afterwards. Here project plans were discussed and a vote on leadership roles was taken, according to requirements. The dramaturgy and rituals contributed to the social construction of leadership and the professional culture. Everyone present were competent co-practitioners of the practice. One role established during fieldwork was that of membership secretary. As its membership had grown significantly, the role was established to collect membership dues and encourage the use of direct debits, in order to promote ongoing membership.

The second are communications practices. Communication is essential in engaging with newcomers, keeping members involved and engendering a feeling of belonging to the group. The resources required to both create and distribute mediated communications are not to be under-estimated. This was evident both from my professional experience, but also from the efforts to launch our local Transition group. I found leaders and active members willing, but marketing competence was not readily available. Inspiring leaders, for example, were not necessarily skilled at writing about their areas of expertise. I saw these similar competence issues at play in discussions about



communications in the groups, in examination of the communications, and in follow up discussions with key contributors to the materials.

The mix of communications used was dependent on the aims of the group and the resources within the group available to work on it. All used digital communications as they had relatively low resource requirements. However, even managing a website was considerable work. I noted conversations with several groups about website management, hosting costs, and, examining the sites, I could see that they found it hard to update them regularly, with content being considerably out of date. The groups felt that providing a website was essential. I questioned, however, how much traffic was reaching the website — an answer no one could provide. This raises the question of understanding communications' effectiveness; to which I will return.

Increasingly, over the fieldwork period and beyond, social media was used to send updates and invites. This format was attractive as it was easy to perform from a smartphone and required little copy to be written. There was the additional benefit of members being able to easily forward on the details to their social networks. However, a question arose — who was receiving these updates? I noted that followers (on Facebook for example) were often familiar names. Social media can be beneficial in that it engages with a reader in their personal space. However, I also noted that often the updates were sent late at night — presumably as that was when the sender had time to do the job — but not necessarily at the time that many would notice it in their timeline.

The Energy group needed a regular means of updating the members. The group wanted to keep their members updated on projects and group news. In part this is because of the activities of the group — their member events were irregular and some of the projects largely invisible — in contrast to the rhythmic and visible progress of food-related activities. I, as a paid member, and owner of social enterprise shares, expected to be kept informed. I also enjoyed reading the e-newsletter which was focused on celebrating results, and which was written by the chair, giving it both gravitas and also a personal touch. The LCZ communications (a digital and paper leaflet) used the character of the Zone Ranger - which helped bring an element of fun to the pleas to get involved.

The public forms of communication discussed in 5.1, such as posters and leaflets, were restricted to special occasions such as speaker events (Energy) and film nights (Transition), when driving attendance was key. The groups explained that this was

because they were time-consuming (IDs). Designing, printing, and, in particular, posting them up was resource-intensive. Often posters would go un-posted due to the lack of volunteers who could distribute them. They were, however, useful in reaching new audiences and claiming the territory of the group.

### **Neglected leadership practices**

I was alerted to leadership practices by ongoing reflection on my mobilisation experiences in comparison to my previous professional environment. I wondered how the development of individuals and groups happened, as well as how the efficacy of activities was measured. The Transition group development training further highlighted the lack of explicit focus on such issues within the groups. My involvement in the LCZ evaluation, helping Lucy conduct focus groups, also alerted me to the lack of formal evaluation in the other groups.

Group development refers to the issue raised in the previous section; the internal processes of identifying needs, skills and roles. The Transition network training recommends the use of mentors to facilitate these practices. The training also recommends the use of various techniques to ensure that all voices are heard in meetings, and that all decisions are made collaboratively. The techniques were to ensure that meetings were extremely participatory and collaborative, and very distinct in style from the traditional form of the Energy group. Explaining it was embedded within the Transition philosophy, the training also recommended celebrating achievements as a form of positive feedback, evaluation, and as a way of preventing the burnout of core members.

The Transition group training was the only form of formal group development I encountered during fieldwork. I noted a 'Communicating Climate Change Training' course offered by Talk Action,<sup>22</sup> circulated by one of the other Borough Network groups. The Transition training is discussed further in the next section but one concern was that it was a paid two-day course over a weekend, therefore not necessarily accessible to those whom it would benefit. Louise from the Energy group was interested in the ideas raised, discussed informally (through my recounting of the key insights) after the end of the official fieldwork. She felt the mentor idea, in particular, could be integrated into their model.

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<sup>22</sup> Talk Action is an independent supplier of UK community engagement training (Talk Action 2018).

Understanding effectiveness was the other practice that was unevenly performed. I have raised the challenge of increasing effectiveness through identifying resources. The issue of understanding the effectiveness of activities is also important in leadership. For resource-strapped groups, maximising efforts are crucial. Communications were an area where there was little understanding. Metrics such as open rates, website traffic, and numbers of followers and likes, generally went unmonitored. Louise explained how the Energy group implemented measuring of click-through rates on the e-newsletter, which was beneficial and, as the open rates were above industry average, motivating for her, given the effort she was committing to writing them (IDs). At the Transition Film night, I noted that there was a sheet of paper at the entrance asking people to fill in their contact details, so they could be added to the group's communications, and which also enquired how they had found out about the event. These two examples of monitoring were simple, effective, and cost free. Other groups did not employ the same practices.

## **7.3 Extending leadership beyond the groups**

Having discussed the specific internal leadership practices of decision-making and communications, and the unevenly performed group development and evaluation of activities, here I discuss practices of collaboration and networking. These were embedded within the leadership practices of the groups. I found it useful to conceive of collaboration and networking as dispersed practices, as discussed in 2.2 (Schatzki 1996). They appear informally within the groups and between groups, and in more formal arrangements, as well as in a multitude of other practice bundles in other sectors of social life (ibid.). They are embedded within the leadership practices performed within these groups, themselves transformed and performed in a particular character and imbuing the groups with their collaborative culture (ibid.) Collaboration and networking practices enabled individuals and the groups to gain and share knowledge, create and extend projects, and build the groups' reputation in their territory of action, thus contributing to the mobilisation of individuals, groups, networks, and other organisations.

### **Understanding networking and collaboration through the practice-lens**

Before exploring the examples, the features of networking and collaboration-as-practice are explained. The Oxford English Dictionary describes 'collaborating' as working together on a single activity or project. 'Networking' is described as (amongst other

examples) a group of people who exchange information and contacts for professional or social purposes. Fundamental differences are those of the aims and the duration of the co-performance. Collaborating is characterised by working closely together for a shared common aim or purpose, typically for a limited period. Networking is characterised by each party benefiting, satisfying their independent aims; the practice is ongoing without limitation.

The aim of networking and collaboration in this context was the advancement of individual and community sustainability via group action, and was therefore a crucial element within leadership practice. At the more nuanced level; for collaboration, there was a shared benefit across all those involved in the performance, such as completing a simple task together, co-producing an event, or a more complex goal. For networking, the aim was more individualistic, whether that is the individual, group or organisation, to further their own aims such as by gaining resources or building their reputation. There was a commonality here too — with the aims aligned to their sustainability concerns, which were themselves centred on behaviour and practice change, to drive carbon dioxide emissions savings, though the means of achieving this differed. As the examples will elaborate further, these two processes and their effects are intertwined. For example, collaborative working grew the social networks and networking precipitated the collaborations between groups.

Thus, the groups and their leadership performances were characterised by both networking and collaboration, with the practices occurring at the same time. I observed that they occurred at multiple scales — with practitioners including individuals, the groups, inter-group and inter-organisation through to national and international networks; the jurisdictional scales of Cox (1998) discussed at the start of the chapter. They occurred in both informal everyday forms, and in more formal performances within the Borough Network, Transition Network and LCCN, and the LCZ and Low Carbon Communities Challenge collaborations with the council. These formal examples are explored in the following sections (7.4 and 7.5).

### **Performances of networking and collaboration**

Within the groups, there was networking and collaboration in abundance. Individuals worked side-by-side on tasks, and chatted over tea and cake, or engaged in conversations online. These were opportunities to satisfy their reasons for mobilising; to forge social connections, gain and share information, which, in turn, aided personal

advancement, whether that be to help them in their task within the group, or in their home, or lifestyle changes. Group endeavours on volunteering days required collaboration to ensure all the required tasks were completed and, where skills were lacking, to ensure knowledge was shared.

Leaders and core members exhibited ongoing collaborative working in order to lead the group, encouraging the (aforementioned) work and social practices, and to progress projects. In the Energy group, those with official roles would co-opt other core members or ask the 'usual suspects' for help on specific tasks; aided by the formal constitution of the group. In the Urban Food group, Emma identified a range of collaborators. Poppy helped with marketing, 'like putting our courses and stuff on Project Dirt' and Dave helped with accounts (25.06.12). Amy 'has helped enormously in terms of just going in the right direction and talking things through' and Tessa helped with the website, contributing to the blog and providing pictures (ibid). As the core group was less formal, there was a fluid flow of resources and help as people's involvement shifted due to external influences. Emma explained how she appreciated 'people's energy while they're there and accept what people have got to offer' (25.06.12). These different styles of performance of collaborative support within leadership-as-practice were essential to the progress of both groups.

Informal networking and collaborations continued through relationships with other groups, particularly those nearby. This occurred due to cross-group membership and because expert individuals (often core group members) shared skills and resources on projects, facilitating the transfer of materials and ideas between groups. These practices maximised resources available to the co-practitioners of leadership in each group. Offering to help also had a positive effect of building relationships for 'returning the favour' (Nurture IDs) when needed, and for reputation-building.

Another example was the monthly 'Green on the Screen' film night hosted by a local bar, which attracted members of several local groups who chatted over food, watched a film, and discussed related issues afterwards. It also attracted people who 'wouldn't necessarily come to an environmental meeting' (Karen ID). This was a location where social networks between groups were built, and also a time where the involvement of the group representative built the group's reputation for leadership. This was a means of building reputation at a broader level but also influencing the initial engagement encounters with newcomers at the event (Nurture IDs).

Groups with similar aims collaborated more frequently. An example was the Sustainable Homes events co-hosted by the Energy group, my local grassroots group (also focused on changing energy practices), and the sustainability group within the Highgate Society, which was particularly interested in improving home energy efficiency and promoting more efficient forms of heating. The three groups shared resources to organise the event, produced a single communications effort, expanding the overall audience of the event through their collaboration. The effect of such interactions also continued beyond the life of the encounter, such as ongoing promises to share resources, to ask an expert about a particular problem, and promises to bring one's time to another project to provide building skills. Ongoing networking provided a flow of mobilised people, ideas, time and energy; the intended outcome of such leadership practices. This flow contributed to meeting individuals' needs via the provision of opportunities, access to knowledge and a vibrant and dynamic community of people. Thus it encouraged their continued mobilisation.

These performances of leadership practices - of working and socialising in particular ways - powered the groups. The dispersed practices of networking and collaboration empowered participants, as co-practitioners, to meet their motivations, build their networks, and drive continued mobilisation (Schatzki 1996). As highlighted by the social movement literature (for example, Diani 1992, Saunders 2013), the practices provided support and resources to the leaders and core groups, increasing their efficiency and impact, as well as providing the social support needed to prevent burn out. The practices helped drive projects and build their reputation, in turn inspiring the group to continue and for newcomers to join. Collaborations (both informal and formal) were driven by social networks and groups' reputation. The groups became part of something bigger — the growth of grassroots sustainability within the wider environmental movement — and growing environmental concern of individual groups and other publics. These effects contributed to the success of the groups themselves, and mobilisation of individuals, groups, and beyond.

## **7.4 Networking at different scales**

Networking as a dispersed practice was embedded within the leadership practices of groups. It was performed to reach out and build support for the leaders and their co-practitioners of leadership within the groups, by drawing in, and on, available resources.

It was also an opportunity for the groups to display, perform, and build their reputation, which was beneficial for driving participant engagement and also provided a means of achieving the mobilisation aims of the leaders.

As discussed at the start of the chapter, these networks existed at particular jurisdictional scales (Cox 1998). Each network had different aims, procedures and spatialities (in terms of location and jurisdiction), and therefore the performance of networking within each group differed. All of the local groups within the ethnography were members of the Borough Network. The Energy group was also active in the national LCCN, and the Transition group was also involved in the Transition Network at a number of scales. Each of these is explored within this section.

## **Borough: The Borough Network**

All groups in the ethnography were members of the Borough Network (briefly introduced in 3.3), with the leaders and some core group participants being the representatives of the groups in the network. The network permeated this ethnography, connecting the groups, with its own core group with whom I engaged, network activities and communications, and influence on and collaborations with Haringey Council. The network provided support to the groups' leadership. In return, the involvement of the groups imbued purpose, power, and leadership status to the network, discussed further below.

The Network described itself as 'an independent formal network for everybody wanting to make Haringey more environmentally sustainable. Our email list enables groups and individuals to share information and resources' (Borough Network 2011). It was formed in 2007 when 100 members from 44 local organisations across the borough agreed to launch it, and was still active at the time of writing. The network pledges to: 'Work for changes urgently needed in our borough if our communities and society as a whole are to survive the growing environmental crises — especially global climate change' (ibid.). The network is active in a range of sustainability endeavours; including energy, waste, travel, food, environment, and community resilience, as well as encouraging a politically active and engaged local community. Resultantly, the network represents over 50 groups including these groups, Green Party groups, residents' associations, and even a Climate Radio station (see Appendix 2 for full list). This wide constituency both

aided the constituent groups and facilitated wider political action by the Network (in its representative capacity), primarily through interaction with Haringey Council, both via agitation and collaboration.

### **Network support of the groups**

The network did not have any material or financial resources of its own, and therefore the benefit was through sharing information and work on sustainability-related issues. This was at the group level, as well as issues facing the borough as a whole. It was facilitated by the virtual networking via the 'Activists List' (a listserv for all to use) and face-to-face at the quarterly 'Gatherings'. Helen, a network core member and who was also active in the Energy group, discussed her experiences of the network. She identified key individuals in each geographical area, such as those interested in energy in Muswell Hill and food in Crouch End, but explained that local action can end up being 'just little bits of things happening' (04.04.12). She described several network benefits, including being connected and responsive:

People can feed in and people can raise an issue up through the email network and say, "This is happening". People can be alerted to things and are able to respond to it quickly...like a consultation (ibid.).

She was referring to consultations on local issues, such as planning, and on wider changes in sustainability policy. She also highlighted the democratic ways of working, and how the network responded to problems that might otherwise have been actioned by the council without a community response (ID). She also described the benefit of empowerment:

It does work in a lot of ways in terms of building capacity in the area for people to feel empowered to do things and then they know, that in Tottenham someone else is doing that - I can go and talk to them about that or I know that person I met in a meeting ages ago was doing this, or knew someone who did this' (ibid.)

Sharing resources and knowing others were active in the same practice change endeavours built capacity across the borough which, given the divides between east and west, Helen felt was invaluable (ID).

The network operated similarly to the constituent groups and was led by a core group coordinating the actions of the network. They were mobilised to lead with their 'Borough Network hat on' (Amy ID), motivated to encourage the network to support and act together. They were leaders of constituent groups, and were considered community leaders by their history of community action.



The network was more overtly political as evidenced by the discussions on the 'Activists List' and during the Gatherings. They provided an environment where group leaders could perform more overt forms of activism. This was cultural and historic, as Karen explained:

[The network] is a very particular organisation because the people who set it up are very anti-authority, very anti-politics, very community orientated, I mean it's an extraordinarily particular take on things. (...) It does make it, not anarchic, but it has a very loose anti-authority structure. (28.05.12)

Online, this resulted in a range of discussions via the self-governing listerv 'Activists list'. Groups were asked to share their news about activities, both for the rest of the list and for a monthly e-newsletter with wider circulation. I read appeals and offers of sharing resources and of the inter-group activities and events. There were invitations to attend and help organise network-level events. The network played an important role in supporting core group members in their leadership practices through marketing, collaborations, and sharing resources, and — as all those I spoke to who were members of the list — feeling inspired as part of a 'bigger movement' (IDs). Alongside this, there were discussions about wider environmental campaigns by, for example, Friends of the Earth, the Campaign against Climate Change, and London Climate Camp.

Alongside the digital networking were the less frequent face-to-face opportunities for networking. The quarterly network 'Gatherings' were characterised by group representatives (the leaders) sharing their updates and ideas, discussions of the wider issues facing the network, pressure and collaborations with the council. Everyone was there to share, listen, and learn as a democratic group of leaders and experts, enjoying the opportunity to express their 'activist habitus' (Crossley 2002, Haluza-DeLay 2009, as discussed in 2.2). The atmosphere was relaxed, with significant time apportioned to sharing food (often potluck style) and, as everyone noted as a highlight, Amy's cocktails (IDs). There was celebration, with the work and fun of social networks being produced. They were convivial and social, with friends catching up and new friendships starting. Helen noted that the network made a concerted effort to hold the celebrations in different parts of the borough with local groups hosting and that:

The central focus of [the Borough Network] has probably not developed that much, it's rather a loose central structure, but the local activities particularly

around gardening projects and community projects like that, have mushroomed.

(04.04.12)

This highlights the crucial role of network support through networking and collaboration practices and expressions of leadership. At one level, it was always shifting; in location, with developing projects and campaigns, and with different attendance of groups each time. At another level, it formed a relatively stable set of practices, which in turn supported the leaders to enable the experiments of local groups to flourish. Together these succeeded in providing the support the groups needed to mobilise.

### **The Borough Network as a leader**

The Borough Networks' constituency of over 50 groups concerned with sustainability gave it great power as the voice of the community in Haringey. This empowered them to influence the council through agitation and collaboration, with a co-constitutive mobilisation effect on individuals, the groups, and the network. These ongoing efforts meant that the Network was the natural partner for the Council for the flagship Haringey 40:20 programme. The programme aimed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 40% by 2020, by 'bringing together residents, businesses, social enterprises, charities and community groups' to influence behaviour (and practice) change and improve infrastructure. It was also to position Haringey as a leader in the field (Green Team ID). Karen highlighted a concern, referring to the anti-establishment influence on the network:

It makes it difficult if you like to fit into any consultation process because there's a certain hands-off anti-establishment attitude which doesn't always sit very well with trying to work in conjunction with the local authority. (28.05.12)

There was a tension, therefore, between the practice performance of agitation and that of collaboration, by the network. The Borough Network was essential to the council's programme. Had the network not been in existence, the council would have found it impossible to consult with local groups in any meaningful way, simply due to the lack of resources to contact them individually. The Network contributed resources by publicising the program, encouraged large attendance at the launch event, and later helped to facilitate the involvement of leaders and experts from the local groups into the 'Carbon Commission' who were tasked, alongside external experts, to develop actionable plans. This involvement of group leaders benefited both the groups and network through greater influence, and the council, who could claim community participation and leadership amongst other councils.

Some in the network were critical of the council at the launch event, pointing out that it was effectively asking the network to do their job for them (IDs). However, during the following year, the council delivered on their promise to establish a community fund for which local groups could bid. The network coordinated several local groups on the content and timing of applications to ensure each received enough funding for their requirements at the time they most needed it. This was deemed a way of 'playing the system' (ID), ensuring that the use of funds was decided by the network, rather than by the council.

### **Extending group influence through the network**

The actions of the Borough Network facilitated idea creation, joint projects and reciprocal resource sharing, and collaborative responses to local, and wider issues. Within the groups, this supported leaders and core group members and increased resource access and resource-use efficiency. Thus the leaders' participation in the network was an essential way of reaching out to spaces of engagement (Cox 1998) and bringing in support into their group; a form of expanding the group capacity (Middlemiss & Parrish 2009). The influence of the groups was extended and their expert status amplified, encouraging mobilisation outside of the groups. The network's practices were more political in tone, and tended to be powered by those with considerable competence through their activist biography and journey through community action. Here, they performed their 'radical habitus', building their durable activist dispositions (Crossley 2002, Haluza-DeLay 2008) amongst other activists, in comparison to the more apolitical discourse of the individual groups. I was struck during fieldwork and beyond, how consistently (and persistently, when answers were not satisfactory) the interaction with the council was maintained. Not only were the network and groups mobilised, but also the council, which was kept on their toes by their relationship with the Borough Network.

## **National: The Low Carbon Communities Network**

The Energy group was a member of the LCCN, a national network supporting community-led sustainability initiatives through information sharing, networking events, and an annual conference. I was not privy to all of the actions of the network,

and therefore this perspective is limited to observations from my event attendance and discussions of the influence of the network with the Energy group.

I attended the daylong annual conference in 2012 alongside Louise and Paul, the current and previous chair of the group, who had been invited to speak. Over 200 participants attended, many of whom were leaders or core group members representing groups engaged in community energy projects, which either produced renewable energy or reduced carbon dioxide emissions. The event included reporting on the network's activities, and opinion pieces on national concerns such as 'Carbon allowances and community energy' (Baroness Worthington) and 'New approaches to community energy' (The Co-operative). There were specialist workshops such as 'Community approaches to the Green Deal', 'Community energy, carbon allowances and the EU emissions trading system' and 'Local low carbon networks — city, county and regional'. The Energy group contributed to the event by sharing 'Homes and energy efficiency – lessons from projects'. These were expert talks, with highly technical content, reflecting the expertise of the leaders attending.

Sharing insights from different groups and developing new ideas was a stated aim of the conference. All the talks encouraged groups to progress their projects by learning, collaborating to solve problems, and returning home inspired. Positive and negative aspects of group projects were shared, which aided their usefulness (Louise ID). Workshop participants talked about emerging ideas for future projects, the priorities, challenges, resources available, and areas where support or external action by the network was needed. The network and the local groups (who had already had success with partners) encouraged collaborations with external partners. Partnerships were seen as essential, given funding limitations faced by the sector at that time. Groups were encouraged to apply for external funding, with mention of the LCCC (see discussion in previous section), local authority's and NGO's. Those who had amassed expertise through the process of writing funding applications contributed their experiences. There was a detailed discussion on these, and other technical and governance tasks, which less progressed groups explained were problematic due to the lack of capacity and competence within them.

The convivial nature of the interactions between groups and the network was in evidence here too. Social networking amongst attendees was actively encouraged between workshop sessions and during mealtimes, and the event ended with a drinks

reception. The benefits were multiple. Attendees explained how they were inspired and appreciated the opportunity to hear honest accounts of both the benefits and challenges of group mobilisation (IDs). For some, this helped them form realistic expectations of what could be achieved and what would be required competence and resource-wise (IDs). For others, it helped develop initial project ideas that their group had been thinking about, and pinpointed people who could be called upon for advice when resourcing their project (IDs). Several noted the efficiencies in not ‘reinventing the wheel’ by sharing information face-to-face, though it was also suggested that a means of sharing resources on an ongoing basis would be helpful (IDs). Networking at the event mobilised the leaders of groups through them reaching out (attending) and returning with inspiring ideas and access to sources of information and expertise. It was also an opportunity for expression of the leaders’ leadership status, expertise, and activism.

### **Influence on the local groups**

The event also mobilised resources of each group through the attendees' time, travel, and preparation of presentations. Louise and Paul explained how beneficial attendance was for them (IDs). For the Energy group, this network served as their peer-group networking opportunity. The Borough Network was predominantly populated by groups involved in food growing. Those involved in energy-related action locally were following the footsteps of the Energy group; they were doing the inspiring rather than being inspired themselves. At the LCCN event, however, they were a leader in the field. Here they had the opportunity to share their insights with groups who would directly benefit, and also the opportunity to learn from other leading groups who had innovated in energy technologies and community engagement programs. Whilst they did not overtly say so, it was clear that they were pleased to be invited to speak, and proud to be able to share their experiences with a group who truly understood the details and the challenges they had overcome. This was their performance of 'radical habitus' (Crossley 2002, Haluza-DeLay 2008), surrounded by other energy-related activists and in a setting that was more directly aligned with their concerns than the Borough Network. They also had the opportunity to listen to — and participate in — discussions with experts on challenges facing the sector, such as the recent changes in government policy. The event was an inspirational ‘celebration of energy’, and the networking proved useful for both ideas for future projects and for connecting with potential speakers for future events. Thus, the event provided the opportunity to reach out through the network and draw in resources over multiple time scales.

The national jurisdiction of the network was useful for supporting the groups. Community energy was experiencing something of a boom at the time. The LCCN ran a qualitative survey of the groups, finding rapid growth levels. In May 2012, there were 700 members of the network. The sector was still in its infancy and it was valuable to introduce those new to leadership roles to those with experience. The mood of the event was that there were tough issues to overcome and still a great deal to be done to encourage the government to develop policy further to aid the sector. The leaders of groups were inspired. There was also a celebratory aspect, acknowledging that the sector had come along way, and further commitment to providing a support network to burgeoning local groups. The network was also engaged in promoting the sector at the national level through influencing policy and writing opinion pieces. However, it was not as visible to me (as a member of a local group) as the activities of, for example, the Transition Network. Since my fieldwork, the LCCN, in contrast to the Borough Network and Transition Network, has ceased to exist (date unknown). I am not aware of the reasons why, though I suspect it was due to a lack of resources (as these were mentioned at the conference) combined with the later shifts in government policy to the detriment of community-energy groups.

## **International: The Transition Network**

The Transition group was part of the international Transition Network (TN). The TN supported the group through a variety of means and at different jurisdictional scales; international, national, regional, and smaller groupings of local groups. Transition was highly visible during fieldwork in several ways. First, whilst their most active project was the Urban Food group (as discussed in 6.3), the Transition group was making efforts to resurrect the core group, hold new Transition events and launch a People's Kitchen.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, discussions at Urban Food social time often strayed into Transition-related topics. Second, there was crossover membership of those I spoke to with other local Transition groups and thus Transition featured in our conversations. Third, there was burgeoning policy, media, and research interest in Transition (as discussed in chapter 2). Fourth, the TN support and materials appeared throughout my fieldwork interactions. The TN activities (described below) contributed to the increased

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<sup>23</sup> People's Kitchens collect surplus food from local businesses, provide training, and feed the community (People's Kitchen 2018).

visibility and influence of Transition in contrast to that of the LCCN.

### **Support from the Transition Network**

The Transition model included guidance on governance. Based in the UK, the centralised TN supported groups across the world by providing detailed information to help them mobilise. Whilst a central tenet of the Transition Movement is that Transition must be localised and place-dependent (Hopkins 2008b), there was influence on all aspects of local governance through provision of shared aims (to which the local groups committed), support materials, and efforts to establish a recognisable brand. In turn these helped core groups by reducing their resource requirements and increasing their efficiency.

The TN published *The Transition Handbook* for practitioners, which explained the aims of the Transition Movement (Hopkins 2008b). It details how to develop an energy descent plan, described the stages of group development, and provided inspiration and examples of how to develop projects (ibid.). Embedded within the network was a staged process of being a ‘mulling’<sup>24</sup> group or an ‘official’ group which was a practice that helped group development by setting key areas for attainment before ‘official’ status could be achieved. This served as an inspiration for groups to aim for, a test of group capacity, and provided a degree of consistency for newcomers (and other interested publics) in their experiences of a Transition group. The TN website hosted a wealth of materials; guidance on launching groups, multiple training opportunities, leadership pieces on Inner Transition and REconomy<sup>25</sup> (both focus areas within the ethos), and guidance on evaluating and celebrating progress. For those trying to find a local group, there was a searchable list of all network members, with contact details. For the leadership of the local group, it provided a detailed set of aims, with guidance on the practices that should be put in place in order to attain them. As Rose explained, this removed a layer of hard work that groups typically have to go through to simply agree on their focus (IDs). It also directed newcomers to them.

The TN network also produced the Transition Daily e-newsletter with network news and blog posts. I noted the benefit of frequency, format and content. It arrived in a personal space (inbox), was a daily reminder of a dynamic wider network to which I

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Mulling’ means thinking about becoming an official group.

<sup>25</sup> REconomy work produces ideas to transform local economies. Examples include new enterprises (energy and food) and local currency projects (Transition Network 2018).

belonged, and contributed to the movement's reputation. Even if I did not have time to open the email, it drew my attention to Transition once again. Leaders of local groups did not have the resources to communicate with their members as regularly, and so this form of centralised support was particularly useful in providing continuous communication. In turn, this helped create the sense of an extensive movement through regularity and through sharing inspirational stories from across the world. The Network was able to provide high-quality content, which also positively contributed to the brand image of the movement.

Transition leaders (from local groups, training sessions, and cross-group events) were all positive about the central support (IDs). Launching a group was straightforward as the support was comprehensive. The tone and content of the material (written and online videos) were accessible and inspirational. As Emma explained, a compelling aspect of Transition and Transition Network was feeling part of a growing global movement and feeling she had the support to help bring her group together (ID). Others explained they felt there was enough adaptability in the ethos and materials to allow groups to innovate and develop according to local needs and capacities (IDs). Leaders drew down the support they needed, when they needed it, and in this instance the international jurisdiction had particular benefits through inspirational stories from across the TN.

The TN also organised an annual conference in the UK, attended typically by core group members. I attended in 2011 and 2012. The event focused on sharing case studies and offering workshops on different strands of Transition - both practice change projects and leadership practices — to help groups, via their leaders, on their mobilisation journey. For some, this was the first opportunity to engage with aspects such as Inner Transition work, with many attending the workshop so they could return to their group and encourage more commitment to individual and group development. Once again, convivial networking with other local groups was crucial. The conference started with a mapping game to enable core groups to meet those close by, and to help forge connections beyond the event. Wendy explained that our local groups had been born from several residents meeting at one of the previous conferences (ID). There were social networking opportunities over tea breaks and lunch, with many staying late in the day to go to the local pub. The tone of the event was about inspiration, celebration and access to support. Accessibility was crucial. Rob Hopkins (the figurehead of the TN) was very visible throughout the event, leading workshops and interactive sessions.



There were similarities to the LCCN conference attended by the Energy group's leaders. The sessions were hosted by the experts in their fields from the TN and some by local core groups leading innovative projects. The sessions were similarly informational, interactive, and included lots of local stories with positives and negatives. This inspired and invigorated the leaders. Attendees left armed with ideas and materials to take back to their groups (IDs), which, as one attendee explained, helped manage unruly participants in his local group (ID).

### **Support at smaller scales**

There were also decentralised forms of support. The Transition group was also active in the regional Transition London group, which provided more frequent face-to-face networking opportunities and, as Emma explained, discussed issues that were more relevant to the region as a whole. The London group hosted events such as the launch of Transition Network books at a local project in Crouch End and one in City Hall. Here, multiple Transition core groups gathered, socialised, and (in Transition parlance) 'celebrated' their achievements. Attendees also described how it was nice to catch up with those they infrequently encountered, sometimes only at the annual conference (IDs). These opportunities also gave access to experts in the Network, such as Rob Hopkins, engendering a greater feeling of involvement in the Network that could otherwise appear quite distanced.

At a more local scale, as highlighted in 7.2, the Transition training resulted in a network that socialised to discuss the outcome of translating training into practice. Ultimately the network was short-lived due to the shared challenge of pressure on time. Concurrently there was an effort to set up a North London super group to network and collaborate. However, this smaller network was constantly in flux, relying on a core person to reinvigorate and organise a meeting, after which the group would fade. More successful were smaller scale collaborations between groups discussed in 7.3, as they more directly helped create group wide progress and were easier to arrange. These experiments of networking at multiple scales were an issue that was unresolved for the Transition Movement. Whilst centralised resources gave the network some stability, finding the most useful scale of local networking was driven by the needs of the locale and was therefore highly experimental.

## 7.5 Leading collaborations

Having discussed the role of formal networks in leadership practices, here I turn attention to the role of formal collaborations, through which the Energy group was able to deliver some of their projects. Funds, gained through collaborative bids, were essential for installing the expensive solar panel technologies, and for elements of outreach projects that required paid human resources and materials. There was a multifaceted relationship: the group leader's capacity and competence helped create successful collaborative bids, and funding allowed innovative projects to launch and succeed. The Energy group's reputation as a leader in the field, from their successes in both funded projects and their independent efforts, drove further funding and attracted new members. A large membership provided resources (person-power, skills, and membership fees) and, alongside the group's reputation, helped attract further resources such as impressive speakers. This gave the leaders influence, particularly with the council and in the LCCN. These factors coalesced and helped the group gather momentum; mobilising the group itself, collaborators, and wider publics.

In 2009, a year after launch, the Energy group and the council successfully won funding to become one of the ten London LCZs, tasked with reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 20% by September 2012. The energy group delivered the programme together with the council. Residents were encouraged to install household measures ranging from power-down plugs to loft insulation. Public engagement activities included communications (group and council), door-knocking and evaluating households (group), installing free measures (group and council) and using a third party to install the paid-for measures. Local businesses were also asked to contribute and the council tackled other infrastructure measures. The Energy group launched a social enterprise in 2009 to handle the LCZ funding and to co-deliver the programme. It received funding from Haringey Council's Green Innovation Fund for set up costs, publicity and the launch event in 2010, which raised further funds through its share offer. Chris explained that this formative stage was crucial, as having an accountable organisation in place helped secure further funds, such as from the LCCC, again in collaboration with the council. The funds were earmarked to install cycle parking and solar panels on local schools, and for the community-engagement efforts. The bid was to support the LCZ, with the income generated to be 'ploughed back into the community so all 1,800 residents can benefit from a low carbon lifestyle' (Energy group 2011). The projects morphed, mainly depending on feasibility once site-suitability was determined.

Resulting additional collaborations were developed; one with Marks and Spencer (M&S) and another with the Methodist church – solar panels were installed on both their roofs.

As I talked to core members about the group's projects, the funding and organisational details faded into the background. The implementation, involving the Energy group, social enterprise and collaborative partners working together — was talked about as a whole. When I asked for details, I noted slightly different answers. This merging was, in part, because the person-power involved was primarily the same. Lucy, the paid coordinator, wore three hats (two funded by different pots, one as a volunteer). The chair and other formal roles within the Energy group were founder members of the social enterprise. Similarly, the council had a single Green team resourced to manage the collaborations alongside other initiatives. Funding streams were occasionally mentioned during particular practices such as meetings with the council. Even then the final reports for the funders were some way off, and therefore the to-do lists of the projects were merged. Alongside some subtle budgetary flexibility, this resulted in beneficial resource efficiencies for the groups' leadership, as they merged practices together.

### **Extending group projects and influence**

The collaboration benefited the group through resourced projects and built the impression of a credible large-scale programme by the group. Participants were aware of the details of the programme to varying degrees depending on their involvement, and from group communications and the Council's. However, no one referenced it without my prompting. From the audience perspective, the details of the complex set-up did not matter. I knew Susan was an LCZ resident, however she could not explain why she had access to resources to install measures in her home, other than through her involvement with the group (11.04.11). Some (prompted) discussions noted that the government funding lent credibility and gave the impression of well-supported projects (IDs). Some felt the council's involvement was beneficial by making it more 'more joined up' (ID) and that it demonstrated the council was serious about green issues (IDs). Others noted that 'as usual', the community was doing all the work (IDs). The Energy group leadership benefited, therefore, from the complexity (of funding and stakeholders), from the resulting generalised discursive impression of the group being the leader of the programme.

The well-resourced collaborations ensured members, newcomers, and broader publics were presented with the array of exciting opportunities for involvement, as highlighted throughout the thesis. The group had a growing leadership reputation in the sector through their success, further increasing group-attractiveness to newcomers, speakers and potential partners. As discussed in 5.1, newcomers had multiple routes into the group. The wide array of opportunities extended the potential audience reach. The group moved from the self-selecting audiences of those interested in sustainability or those reached by passing by a stall, to new publics. They included residents and businesses in the LCZ, parents, teachers and pupils at the schools, and the church congregation. Each received communications from their trusted community on a collaboration that directly affected them. This positively effected mobilisation and the group benefited from their collaborative communication efforts.

### **Effects on the group**

Whilst there were benefits for the group, there was also pressure on their resources. The chair and core group had technical and managerial competence, contributing greatly to the success of the initial bids. These opportunities presented exciting ways for leaders to develop their competence (Paul 03.04.12). The group understood that there would be additional practices to be completed, such as needing volunteers for door-knocking, regular meetings with the council, managing budgets, and filing annual accounts (Chris 06.04.12). This necessitated the paid-for role, which Lucy occupied, to fulfil some of these new practice requirements. Others were undertaken by the core group and encouraged some members, with relevant expertise and/or time, to become more involved.

There were two areas that were particularly challenging for leadership. The first were the practices involved in setting up the social enterprise, highlighted by Chris (06.04.12), who explained they had registered the social enterprise to bid for the funding, as they required a legal entity to handle the finances. At the time, the way the enterprise was set up was unique and required considerable group efforts and capacity to do so. There were few previous examples of community-led groups developing such initiatives. Chris's legal background and the professional skills of other core members were crucial in providing the competence required to design the social enterprise structure and share offer (ibid.).

The second area that was challenging for leadership was evaluation of the LCZ project, described by Lucy and experienced first-hand during the fieldwork. Lucy explained that there had been little thought given to monitoring and evaluation practices by the funders at the outset of the programme. After it had begun, an external agency was brought in to help all the local groups measure and provide some consistency between them. My impression (from meetings) and, as the core group concurred, was that it was 'a bit of a fudge' as measurement was added later, there was no industry standard, and because each group was engaged in unique projects which were hard to compare. There were adverse effects on resources and morale in the group. Questionnaires and focus groups were conducted, and discussions of how to turn results into the 'finger in the air' numbers required (ID). It sapped time and energy. Consequently, I was drafted in to support Lucy. On most areas of the project, the working relationship between group and council was characterised by camaraderie. Each party was complimentary about the other and appreciated their efforts. Here tensions arose as each party had differing views on methods and responsibility. All involved agreed monitoring practice was useful — particularly for justifying further funding and streamlining projects. It was also useful for providing evidence for other community groups and to support government policy. However, they lamented that qualitative and agreed up-front measures would have been more appropriate.

### **Building momentum of an entrepreneurial group**

The group's leadership embraced these opportunities and, despite the difficulties, the projects were successful, drawing in resources and increasing the impact of the groups' endeavours. Collaborations mobilised the leaders; with more innovative and technology-driven ideas to become a reality, building the group, and their individual reputations as experts. The opportunities were (at that time) there for the taking and, from an audience-mobilisation perspective, they helped solve the problem of energy not being engaging, as Louise and I discussed (ID). Leaders talked about 'playing the game' — collaborating with the council, whom they also agitated, to achieve their aims (IDs). This was a balancing act — and a practice — at which they were skilled.

Over time, the increased efficiency of the projects was visible. This was due to the merging of projects, the strategic use of resources, and because leaders were more skilled. The projects moved from the resource-intensive set-up to the later stages of replication and roll out of similar technologies, with well-rehearsed communications practices in place. Alongside this, their reputation as leaders in the field was cemented.

The LCZ was a success, with their 20% reduction in carbon aim surpassed. Their reputation aided the replication and rollout, alongside the requirements of the Haringey 40:20 programme (and funding streams within), towards which these activities later contributed.

A non-member asked me whether the funding was crucial to the group. The funded and non-funded projects ran alongside each other, and together they helped build the reputation and momentum of the group. Thus the co-constitutive relationships are, in part, due to the collaborations. However, the group had enormous capacity and entrepreneurial spirit. These projects were leading in the sector and the social enterprise was a first. The group, their projects, and Paul won several awards. Some of the project leaders were experienced community organisers - Lucy was also a core member of the Nurture group and Chris of his residents' association (IDs). Despite Chris's claim of not seeking glory (see 5.2), there was a competitive element to their actions — of winning funding and being leaders in their field. The professional structure meant the core group had the support of the team, and thus could be a little more adventurous. In short, I conclude their efforts and skills would be redirected to other funding sources and innovative ideas.

The LCZ and LCCC funding was time-limited. The Haringey 40:20 programme was ongoing, but there was no replacement government-level funding. The group successfully rolled out the collaboration activities across the borough. The leadership of the Energy group, understanding the lack of ongoing funds, also embedded low-resource activities into the rollout, such as conducting energy audits and making low-cost energy-saving recommendations. This development in leadership practices meant that activities could continue despite the challenges facing the sector.

I would have liked to return and ask the core group how projects and collaborations have shifted. From the communications I have received there has been a greater focus on non-funded activities, continued community engagement, and showcasing practice change through the Open Homes<sup>26</sup> programme. Louise reported in 2015 that prospects for community energy groups were challenging, following a retreat on policy and funding support from central government. Despite this, the core group adapted. They installed a large solar array on another local school, in 2017, funded entirely through the

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<sup>26</sup> Open Homes was an event where homes using energy saving and producing technologies were open to the public.

sale of community shares. They were also experimenting with new financing models and will benefit from a new initiative from the Mayor of London, who is providing seed funding for improving London's environment (Energy website 2018). Again, the entrepreneurial and adaptive culture of the leadership of the group can be seen.

The collaboration provided a means of reaching out and drawing in resources to the group's space of dependence (Cox 1998). Both forms of leadership practice were performed in similar convivial and collaborative working styles. For collaborations, there were greater pressures on the group's resources. There were, however, benefits for the delivery of the group's projects, and for the mobilisation of its leaders. Funding was, at the time, limited to energy-related groups. Arguably, given their more limited resource requirements, such complex funding and organisational developments were not required. On the other hand, it would be interesting to engage in 're-imagining' (in Transition parlance) and imagine how an urban food growing group might expand and change the urban landscape if they received significant funding.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the substantial work of leadership-as-practice behind the scenes, which explains how grassroots sustainability groups mobilise beyond the group. The discussion also contributed further understanding of how and why participants are involved and the groups' practices of mobilisation. Chapter 4 focused on participants' motivations and the inclusive environmentalism of the groups engaged in practice-change-oriented practices. Chapter 5 explained how groups provided supported experimentation through participant journeys, from initial engagement, through enrolment, to involvement and exit. Chapter 6 determined the common characteristics of convivial sustainability: inspirational projects with 'liked-minded' participants, accessible expertise, supported experimentation through communal experiential learning, and social interactions and rituals that drive belonging.

Underpinning these characteristics are the leaders and leadership practices discussed in this chapter. Examining leadership-as-practice in neighbouring groups found common characteristics — collaborative leadership, which was expert-led and convivial — and highlighted the importance of networking and collaboration within and between groups and beyond. Together these drove the mobilisation of individuals, core groups, leaders,

groups, networks, and formal collaborations. In turn, these practitioners co-perform the mobilisation of a movement; a particular form of convivial, connected, and collaborative environmentalism, which successfully changes practices.

The aim of leadership-as-practice is to manage the relationship between the group and participant, and finding the balance between furthering the group's progress and fulfilling the needs of those involved. It is also to manage the leader's own relationship with the group, through building support with other key members, and through building supportive relationships with neighbouring groups and wider networks. Leadership practices also resource these relationships and the groups' practices of mobilisation. As highlighted by Cox (1998), leaders reach out and draw in the resources that are available at different scales. This differs for each group depending on the networks, funding, and interested stakeholders they can connect with. In turn, this interaction in spaces of engagement provides support and legitimacy to other groups and organisations in building their spaces of dependency (ibid.).

Edwards and McCarthy 2004 (in Bate et al. 2005) identify how groups gain varied resources. These increase group capacity, thus aiding in the groups' ultimate aim of increasing community capacity and resilience (Middlemiss and Parrish 2009). Success is built through these practices; with resources and support breeding mobilisation, in turn building reputation, and further resources, resulting in a virtuous circle. I believe that entrepreneurial spirit is also characteristic of successful grassroots sustainability groups, embodied by the leaders and core groups. It is embedded in seeking innovative solutions, and through networking and collaborating at different scales. It requires taking a risk by ceding a little control over the group. But it offers the potential for great reward: the building of momentum through the fluidity of ideas and resources and the expansion of the group, its networks, stakeholders, and publics. This explains the longevity of the groups.

Exploring formal networking and collaboration practices brought attention to spaces of engagement (Cox 1998); which here are the multiple jurisdictional scales of networks and the complex collaborations, which offered differing opportunities for drawing down resources unevenly affecting the groups. In the networks explored, scale has discursive power. To use one example, the 'international' nature of the Transition network, their support material, and communication practices helped build the sense of a large multicultural movement. The layers of support at other scales combined with the TN to



create a more resourceful and rhythmic space-time of engagement, which my local group could enter and draw down resources from, to build its own space of dependence (ibid.).

In the Energy group collaboration, the dynamism of resources was more complex, with heightened benefits to the group, but also increased requirements for resources and particular practices to be performed by the group. In all the networks and collaborations, the groups contributed reciprocally through their co-constitutive involvement. Leadership practices in the group were inherently connected with the practices of networks and collaborations at the various and/or multiple jurisdictional scales. Thus, the groups, networks, and collaboration partners were engaged in a bundle of leadership practices, which were dispersed (and recognisable as leadership practice-as-entity), becoming increasingly culturally-nuanced in each leadership practice-as-performance (Shove et al. 2012). They shared common features, such as collaborative working and conviviality, which characterised all the grassroots sustainability groups in this ethnography.

Through the more nuanced understanding of leadership as leadership-as-practice, the connections between groups, networks, and other stakeholders came more directly into view. Taking a step back, the practice lens was instructive. The groups practice networking, but describing them as relying on networking (for example, Diani 1992, Saunders 2013) does not satisfactorily capture the relationships, layers, and dynamism involved. The practice lens proved instructive, revealing the complex bundles, how leadership practices share commonality (as-entity), as well as cultural specificity (as-performance) (Shove et al. 2012). There are shared dispersed practices performed in groups and through their networks and collaborations which are then 'transfigured' (Schatzki 1996) into particular forms by each set of performers (in their individual spaces). The ideas of reaching out and drawing back resources from and through different interconnected spaces and scales (Cox 1998), helped understand the dynamic flows in space and over time. It is also useful to consider how it is the perspective of the researcher, and their ethnographic attention, which determines where the action is (Shove 2017), as I reached out and drew in materials to my mobilised position in the groups. I reflect on the utility of the theoretical framework and the ethnographic approach further in the conclusion, to which I now turn.

## Chapter 8 Conclusion: Understanding grassroots mobilisation

I was inspired to explore how grassroots sustainability groups were mobilising due to becoming increasingly concerned about sustainability. My journey into community-led action in grassroots sustainability groups, having never been involved before, raised questions about why such groups had been successful in mobilising new participation, as identified by Seyfang (2009a,b). I embarked on an MSc, conducting research with a local group involved in community energy, which introduced me to other neighbouring groups. Before long, through my participation and ethnographic fieldwork, I became increasingly active, passionate about the issues, and experienced more gradual and unexpected shifts in practices such as energy usage and food buying.

When considering my research approach, my husband asked me how I was going to measure their success. I responded that the groups' effectiveness in changing sustainable behaviour and practices — and how much carbon dioxide emissions they were saving — were not my concern. The participants identified with the environmental movement, as did I. Much of the academic literature on Transition identifies it as a movement (as discussed in 2.1). My aim, therefore, was to understand how the groups — involved in a plethora of sustainability related activities — were mobilising as part of the environmental movement. Mine was a more basic question: why would anyone want to spend their spare time in these groups, particularly those who were new to community-led action? This was important in a context of UK policy calling for the community to help deliver carbon reduction targets at the local and national level (discussed in 1.2).

I, and other participants, remained involved due to the groups' success, both through the positive effects on my practices and from the overall success of the projects. The groups are concerned with their efficacy, though they focus on project successes rather than hard measures (such as numbers of people reached, or amount of energy use reduced), except when external funders demanded it. The longevity of the groups explored in this thesis, and their continuing ability to attract new members, suggests that they are characterised by high levels of entitativity and that their practice-change endeavours are successful (Forsyth 2018). I have recommendations for how groups may increase the effectiveness of particular practices, their use of resources, and of their communications

strategies. These were gleaned from exploring mobilisation through the practice approach, which encouraged me to take a wider look at all the practices involved in the mobilisation; both practice change focused and the more mundane. These recommendations will be communicated in a separate report to the groups.

My focus in this discussion has been the co-performing of grassroots sustainability group action. The reasons for my increasing involvement were atypical, in part due to conducting fieldwork. However, I found the stories of initial engagement and increasing involvement mirrored mine, with many people putting considerable time and effort into the groups (Klandermans 2007). Their stories of shifting practices and environmental values also resembled mine (Hards 2011). I found the analogy with dating useful, viewing participation as a relationship. It requires an initial and ongoing attraction between individuals and groups who then need to nurture the relationship. From a temporal perspective, I established how each partner is introduced, their initial attraction, the discovery of a closer fit, how the relationship develops and, for some, how it ends. This thesis contributes a more nuanced understanding of how the groups maintain these relationships, in some cases for over ten years. The analogy is also useful because every relationship is unique. However, by looking at the practices involved, it has been possible to see similar ingredients that help and hinder the relationship, and how it affects and is affected by others in and beyond the group.

To address how the groups were mobilising, I gathered the materials on which this thesis is based from an ethnography, which involved observing, participating, reflexive interviews, and multiple informal discussions over the fieldwork year during 2011-2012. I remained connected to the groups, particularly through their communications, extending the ethnography during the final thesis stages to 2018. To explore *how* the groups were mobilising, I used a practice approach (Shove et al. 2012), where practice is the unit of analysis. This enabled me to delve into the elements of practice (aims, competences and materials), practice performances, and their co-practitioners (ibid.) (as discussed in 2.2). Examining grassroots sustainability movements through the lens of practices was a productive approach. I built on the existing application of Bourdieu's earlier formulation of practice and the focus on 'radical habitus' (Crossley 2002, Haluza-DeLay 2008), to elements and performances, practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance, dispersed and integrative practices, and their arrangement (Schatzki 1996, 2001, 2011, Shove et al. 2009, 2012).

The same practice lens was applied to thinking through the research process, adding a methodological contribution. I considered ethnography-as-practice, in conjunction with Pryke et al.'s (2003) framework, which drew attention to the multitude of co-practitioners, from inception to distribution of this thesis. I felt that this was important, given my existing connections to some of those involved and, in practice, it was beneficial in our conversations. The approach also helped draw out parallels between research practice and mobilisation, with social networks influencing the delineation of the field site just as they influence the development of groups and networks.

My professional background in communications and my academic background as a geographer drew my attention to communication practices and socio-spatial relations. The discussion of practices of communication contributes to more recent attention on communications, such as the role of digital activism in social movements (see, for example, Gerbaudo 2012 and Juris 2012), by understanding the practices involved in a range of communications types, and in their distribution efforts. I added nuance to understanding the smaller and everyday spaces of contention (Miller 2000, Nicholls 2009, Martin 2013, Nicholls et al. 2013). These include the face-to-face interactions, their virtual communities, communication territories, and networks. I performed an ethnography of neighbouring groups in a single borough, which were active in a range of innovative activities. They included promoting energy saving, renewable technologies and public campaigning, building community and traditional buildings, growing food and seeding other projects using permaculture techniques, Transition (within the Transition Network), and communal foraging and grafting. This cross-group comparison contributes to the existing knowledge, otherwise typically focused on single types of groups, and which also tends to treat those single types of groups in a homogenous and static way (discussed in 2.1). I found significant similarities between the groups in the shared motivations of individuals, and recognisable practices-as-entities involved in the mobilisation of individuals, the groups, and beyond (Klandermans 2007, Shove et al. 2012). Practice-as-performance varied co-constitutive of each group's culture.

Mine was an extended ethnography (from 2010-2018), with interruptions during analysis and writing up. My mobilisation has been characterised by a messy exit-phase, as I was unable to attend my groups' activities after starting a family. I remained connected to the groups through communications and the occasional visit, and was still inspired and influenced in my food and energy practices. This was beneficial, drawing

greater attention to the temporality and evolution of participation, of the mobilisation of individuals, and how these affect the groups. Understanding journeys of participation that intersect in a group, shifting motivations and the practices involved in each stage, adds nuance to the existing understanding of individual participation and broader stages of social movement mobilisation (Klandermans 1997, Della Porta and Diani 2006, Hards 2011).

My extended ethnography also drew attention to the challenges faced by participants as they experienced significant lifestyle changes that can shift involvement patterns, contributing to a longer story of biographies of activism. These individual stories come together; with co-practitioners' involvement exhibiting both dynamism and, for some, considerable regularity. The extended write-up phase, culminating in 2018, found that the groups were still active, with the same leaders and many of the same active members, ten years on. This alerted me to the importance of leadership-as-practice, and reconfirmed that this was a significant part of the environmental movement, driving sustainability-related practice change and community resilience. The policy and funding landscape has changed over the ten-year period. Political efforts to achieve obligations and carbon dioxide emissions reductions have waned in the UK. Funding for groups and experimentation has decreased and policies such as the feed-in tariff are now less financially beneficial. However, these groups have longevity. They were passionate about their efforts to change practices and showed entrepreneurial spirit, identified as characteristics of this form of mobilisation.

My early experiences introduced me to the array of groups involved in a range of sustainability-related innovations and experiments, connected together by the Borough Network, in turn both agitating and collaborating with the council. Fieldwork revealed the complexity of the networks and collaborations, informal and formal, at different inter-related scales. As discussed in the previous chapter on leadership, there was a co-constitutive relationship, with leadership of groups drawing in resources from and through various jurisdictional scales and, through their co-performance in spaces of engagement, contributing to both their own and other organisational spaces of dependence (Cox 1998). This fluid, layered, and shifting activity was co-performed by groups, resulting in mobilisation and a particular form of sustainability, which I have described as convivial, connected, and collaborative environmentalism, and which successfully changed practices.

In the thesis I addressed **three dynamics** within the research. First, the individuals' perspective (as co-practitioners of mobilisation) and their descriptions of their long- and short-term motivations and biographies of participation. I identified common stages of mobilisation: engagement, enrolment, involvement and exit. Second, the group practices of mobilisation identified by participants, observed and participated in with the groups. Third was a more outward looking perspective, to understand how the groups mobilise wider publics and their place within their networks. Each of the four empirical chapters explored these dynamics with varying focus. I moved from motivations, through stages of participation, to a deep dive into the ethnographic encounters with each group, to leadership of the groups and how this drove interactions and relationships across space and at multiple scales.

Through the explorations I have identified **four key ingredients** found in these successful groups, performed differently in each, but recognisable as practice-as-entity, which I summarise in turn and relate back to the discussions of theory and method. The first ingredient is practice-change-oriented sustainability co-performed by the individuals, groups, and networks. The second is building individual and group competence through supported experimentation throughout the journey of participation. Nurturing convivial sustainability in the group is the third ingredient, and collaborative leadership, co-performed through a leadership-as-practice bundle within and beyond the group, is the fourth. Leadership practices reach out and draw back resources, through collaboration and networking both within, between, and beyond the groups. I expand on these ingredients, and discuss the findings and wider implications in relation to the literature, in the next sections. I conclude with some final reflections on the relatability of these ingredients to other groups and other mobilisations, and on performing ethnography-as-practice.

## **(1) Practice-change-oriented sustainability**

Understanding mobilisation-as-practice turned attention to the co-practitioners of practice and their understanding of motivations for, and the co-constitutive effects of, participation. Talking about motivations revealed their multiplicity and temporality. Their descriptions resonated with Klandermans' (2007) understanding of why social movement participation appeals: through instrumentality, identity, and shared ideology. The social practice lens explained how co-performance of group mobilisation practices shifted motivations and values over time, which is co-constitutive of the culture of the

group (Röpke 2009, Hards 2011, Shove et al. 2012).

Across the groups, motivations consisted of both individual and communal benefits, shifting further toward the latter with deepening involvement. Participants needed a deeper 'fit' with the groups to enrol, commit, and remain involved. Changing practices (both in the home and together in groups) and the benefit of communal action, a shared-mind space, and a physical space where the group could co-learn and experiment, was essential, though the spaces had differing degrees of permanence. The sense of alterity, enjoyment, and building social networks were central to shifting motivations (Diani 1992, Aminzade and McAdam 2002, Hards 2011). There were long-term motivations and those that inspired action on a given day, such as more immediate learning, the evocation of the senses, and having fun. Their rich description adds detail to the more limited understandings of motivations in the literatures on single kinds of group-action, and the similarities across groups indicate a wider, shared discursive repertoire. The collective action frames of social movements resonate here (see, for example, Benford and Snow 2000). The groups shared an inspiring, action-oriented, community-benefit call-to-action, though there were differences in the specific details of framing. Participants described what they were doing as changing practices together, though their language mirrored the prevailing discourse of individual and community-led behaviour-change (discussed in 2.1). The claim of benefit for the 'community' was successful at mobilising, in part due to its vague definition, and therefore individualised understanding of what 'community' means. The combined narrative of practice change and community was inclusive and appealing. It also circumvented the complexity of a wide range of motivations and avoided a political stance that would have been off-putting for some.

The groups were attractive, therefore, mobilising those new to community-led action, alongside those who are more experienced. This confirms Seyfang's (2009) findings and contributes a nuanced understanding of the temporality and multiplicity of motivations beyond the core concern of the group. They retained their members, as the longevity of membership later revealed. This mobilisation occurred, and continued, as the groups offered multiple opportunities for involvement, and therefore a sense of progression and change. Interest was continually renewed, competences shifted and were shared, there were new people to engage with, different tasks, and the spatial and temporal effects of action on the environment were visible and shifting. Experimentation, alterity, and education were embedded in the groups' culture, and

sensorial and emotional benefits in day-to-day experiences.

Considering the groups at the broader scale, this action was in the community, led by the community, and for the benefit of the community, which corresponds with the discussions within the community energy literature (for example, Walker et al. 2010b). Biographies showed a mix of those with experience and those new to community action, but with the shared momentum to act and at a juncture where life events (such as work or retirement) conspired to provide time to participate. More overt forms of activism and political discourse were less visible. The groups performed a form of inclusive environmentalism with practice-change-oriented aims, performances, and practitioners. This was also implicated in the activation of the borough-wide network and wider collaborations, corresponding with Rob Hopkins' (2008b, 2010) explanation of why being apolitical and collaborative can be of benefit, rather than making action less effective (Chatterton and Cutler 2008, North 2009). Jumping ahead slightly to the discussion of the role of networks, alongside groups, I argue the situation is more nuanced. By enacting activist 'radical habitus' in some spaces (such as targeted agitation of the council on particular issues) alongside the collaborative projects, is precisely how groups and their networks are successfully influencing sustainability-related policy, thus having political effect (Crossley 2002, Haluza-DeLay 2008, Martin 2013).

Activists must start their journey somewhere. These groups play multiple roles; inspiring those new to community-action, encouraging deeper involvement within the groups' practices, and also facilitating a journey to wider activism and a longer biography of action. A longitudinal return to the groups and interviewees would provide useful insights as to how effective they are at these later stages. At a more detailed scale, each group attracted participants through their specific practice change endeavours, and their spatial, rhythmic, and cultural characteristics. The performance of participation created particular sensorial and emotional registers, which heightened the feeling of action, and satisfied motivations, encouraging ongoing individual mobilisation and driving the vibrancy of the groups. Building on the understanding of the groups as performing inclusive sustainability, and mobilising practice-change-oriented aims, performance, and practitioners, I gave more attention to the shifting nature of motivations, the dynamism of groups, and why people remain involved.



## **(2) A journey of supported experimentation**

Participants engaged in supported experimentation throughout their journey of involvement, which shifted aims and competence through each performance, and resulted in a gradual shift in environmental values (Hards 2009, Shove et al. 2012). Groups provided support through expertise and a protected space and time, with different skill levels working in collaboration, and the combination of known and innovative new practices. The known was also important; with participants easily able to engage with the groups and feeling a connection, through carrying competence and shared repertoires from other (activist and non-activist) fields (Crossley 2002). Experimentation included learning about production technologies and energy saving techniques, permaculture, traditional building, grafting, gathering, preserving, and cooking, depending on the group. Learning was encouraged through performing enjoyable practices together. This ensured dynamism (of varying pace) in groups and projects, commonly providing ongoing opportunities for newcomers and the leadership teams alike. For the latter this extended beyond the day-to-day activities to developing new ideas, managing material resources, and other less visible leadership practices. It was crucial for attracting and retaining participation at every level of involvement.

I identified four stages across the groups, established through the key recognisable practices-as-entity that helped and hindered mobilisation (Schatzki 1996, Shove et al. 2012):

- Engagement was the initial spark, requiring a tipping point in motivations and a concomitant introduction or meeting of partners, and, crucially, an initial match between individual and group. Communications practices and social networking practices encouraged newcomers to the group.
- Enrolment required a deeper fit and a wish to formalise the relationship in some way, though levels of commitment varied. This stage required attractive welcomes, introductions to opportunities and an interpersonal spark, and was supported by engaging rhythmic communications to build ongoing connections.
- Involvement was the deepening of the relationship and sense of belonging. Building social connections, meeting motivations, and ongoing feelings of individual and group worth were integral, encouraged by cultural rituals such as food sharing, social time, and celebrations.

- Exits, which many thankfully never reached, were gradual and often partial, part of a longer biography of participation, as members shifted attention or capacities changed. Some are unavoidable, and yet some could be prevented through groups giving greater attention to helping individuals contribute and achieve their goals.

These stages are messy, with some individuals never becoming active, some shifting from other groups or networks, but the vast majority remaining involved either in the group or in a wider repertoire of action. Participants built competence through supported experimentation. Concomitantly the groups built competence through their members' increasing involvement. Thus the mix of members at different stages, with varying skills and knowledges, all contributed to the ongoing dynamism of the groups. The flow of members in, through, and between groups added to the shifts in ideas, materials, and skills. The communal encounters were characterised by expertise, sensorial experiences, social time and fun.

Temporal understandings of mobilisations tend to focus on movement-level temporalities (for example, Della Porta and Diani 2006) or group-level temporalities described in the Transition Training (Tuckman and Jensen 1977). The ethnography and practice lens add nuance to the rare explorations of participant temporalities; of the individuals' journeys into and through mobilisation, and the group dynamism of capacity, competence and practice change, shifting in each group mobilisation performance (Klandermans 1997, Shove et al. 2012).

Understanding the importance of the journey of supported experimentation in the mobilisation of the groups contributes to more recent (and still limited) literature on the role of learning in sustainable communities. Bradbury and Middlemiss (2014) build on the work of Franklin et al. (2011) who, at a neighbourhood scale, conclude skills and knowledge are the products of social relations, affecting the creation of sustainable communities. Bradbury and Middlemiss (2014) examine grassroots associations (see the terminology discussion 2.1), through Lave and Wenger's (1998) community-of-practice lens, to understand learning processes; how it occurs, how it affects participants, and the role of learning in the association itself. They highlight the importance of engaging in routine practices to share and gain skills, and how both sharing and learning contributes to the sustainability of the group itself. This resonates with my findings, which add further temporal understanding to learning new practices through journeys of

participation, and the role of learning in the support from, and activities of, the networks. Building on the crucial practices identified at each stage of mobilisation, I turned attention to the details and differences in the practice-as-performance of mobilisation in each group, and how supported journeys of experimentation occurred.

### **(3) Convivial sustainability**

Through ongoing participant observation, I explored how each group provided support to its members, and encouraged us on our journeys of participation. I identified practices that help mobilisation, building ‘groupiness’ and the groups’ success, and recognisable as practice-as-entity across the groups (Shove et al. 2012, Forsyth 2018). Together these five characteristic features, amplified through groups’ atmospheres of innovation and a shared mind-space, created a form of convivial sustainability. The features include:

- Inspirational, successful projects, with participants with shared aims.
- Easy access to friendly expertise and reciprocal learning.
- Protected space and time for supported experimentation.
- Communal experiential opportunities.
- Welcomes, social time, celebrations and shared food.

The shared longevity of the groups emphasised the benefit of these ingredients, and identified opportunities to give more thought to mobilisation practices. Mentoring and determining motivations, skills, and opportunities for contribution, could drive enrolment and increasing involvement. The ingredients were performed differently in each group, in practice-as-performance, co-constitutive with the aims, culture, capacities, and competences of the group and its members. There were demographic differences between the groups, though they were all led by women, with experience of either community action or management through their previous professions.

Considering the socio-spatial relations produced by mobilisation (Martin 2013), I identified how the project spaces — their permanence, accessibility, geographies, and transitions — created unique characteristics. Commonly, they rendered space productive; energising the built environment, making nature edible at different temporal scales, and recreating wilderness. They encouraged participants to actively contribute to this change, both within and outside the groups. The dramaturgy of rituals of

celebration, sociality, and food sharing influenced culture and individuals' emotional and sensorial experiences of the groups (Jasper 2010). Food sharing was vital in all groups, though the formality of the occasion, recipes, and receptacles varied. Food sharing was social glue and the ingredients, rituals of serving, eating and discussing, and the spaces in which it was shared, heightened its meaning (Law 2001). It was also a means of teaching, a form of governance and silent politics in some groups. Food was also essential in the research encounters, giving the encounter a convivial feel and encouraging reflections on the role of reciprocity and sociality in the groups (Belk 2010).

Each group created unique practice change performances; combining particular ingredients and spaces to create impactful learning experiences. Here I highlight the different ways in which this is performed, in relation to their individual literatures discussed in chapter 2. The Energy group re-created home-like experiences in workshops hosted by members, included experiential activities where possible, and injected social time into their traditional-style events. This approach was notably more practice change, sensorial and communal, in contrast to the behaviour-change and rational-man approaches of EcoTeams and making energy visible style interventions (Jackson 2005, Burgess and Nye 2008, Hargreaves 2010). It *was* possible to create similarly favourable conditions for learning and change as those of the more naturally engaging food endeavours (as perceived by the core of the Energy group), it just required a little more creative thinking.

The Nurture group created a microcosm of the resilient community; combining home comforts, relaxation, and work in an ever-changing oasis in the city. The Urban Food group merged hard work and celebration of food into every meal. These two groups were ostensibly similarly engaged in community gardening. However, they displayed considerable differences in their mobilisations and effects on individuals, and on their wider publics. Nurture engaged the close community, encouraging events and celebrations within their space, whereas Urban Food (literally) seeded more distanced community groups within the borough, or those neighbouring within north London. However, they also shared the characteristics and ingredients of the Energy and Foraging groups that rendered them successful.

The Foraging group guided learning in identification, gathering, preparation, recipes, and more creative uses for local plants. The seasonal events and network structure

meant the virtual community was essential for mobilisation, by creating belonging, support, and arranging face-to-face encounters. As discussed in 2.42, foraging tends to be examined as a solo endeavour rather than in groups, or through structural perspectives (McLain et al. 2012). Jehlicka and Smith (2011) discuss barter, mutual help and gift-giving, which are important in family and friendship networks of foraging, and as ‘quiet sustainability’ (Smith and Jehlicka 2013). There are parallels here with the skills, knowledge, and resources, such as technologies, implicated in the mutual help within the group, rather than the ingredients themselves (though excess produce was also shared via the social network). Furthermore, some Foraging group practices, such as group grafting in public space, add a unique activist stamp on the urban landscape with unknowable, temporally distant effects. This ethnography also contributes understanding of how urban foraging can connect with other kinds of environmental action, through networks and experiential activities.

The groups succeeded through similar impacts — communal enjoyment, social networking and belonging, and individual learning, shifting practices both intended to be changed, and others, inspired by the groups' activities. The individuals reached by the group represented a significant, practice-changing focused, mobilised audience, involved in convivial sustainability. The groups were still thriving, remaining active today in 2018 at the time of writing. Building on the understanding of how groups mobilise through being practice-change-oriented, providing supported experimentation through the journeys of participation, and performing convivial sustainability, I turned attention to understanding how the groups remained energised.

## **(4) Collaborative leadership within, between and beyond the groups**

The practice lens drew my attention to leadership as a social construction, with the co-practitioners (including the leader, core group, wider membership and publics beyond the groups) being those who convey and co-perform leadership. The performance and structure of groups varied from the highly professional to an informal network, dependent on their aims, culture and resources. However, all groups were characterised by collaborative leaders, leadership styles, and leadership practices. Walker et al. (2010b) recognised the importance of interpersonal relationships and trust in the community as success factors for community energy, and this was true of all the groups

I researched. Mobilisation within, between, and beyond the groups was driven by this way of working: collaboration and networking, being expert-led and inspiring the convivial nature of the activities. The leaders epitomised these characteristics and encouraged their embedded nature in the groups. Thus shared leadership characteristics and leadership practices explain the longevity of the groups, their leaders, and their members.

This form of leadership created clear practice change centred goals, enjoyable sensorial activities, and rituals of socialising and celebration, which, in turn, mobilised and supported the leaders and more active members. An area for greater consideration by groups would be to identify and break down individual leadership practices. The groups could then match the tasks with the skills and ambitions of members of the wider membership, to improve their efficacy and build the capacities of the groups.

Exploring leadership-as-practice identified the less visible practices that are crucial in mobilisation: member management and communications practices. Performance varied between groups, associated with aims, group structures and the expectations of members. To perform these resource-intensive tasks, further mobilisation of competences, resources, and practitioners was required. Often this was difficult, typically relying on the leader, or a limited set of participants. In establishing the importance of communication, at engagement and in driving belonging to the groups, the challenges around practice-resourcing should not be underestimated. Benham and Snow (2000) discuss the effects of frames, and I earlier highlighted the combined importance of frames in mediated and face-to-face communication. I contend that the distribution of the frames — their limited presence, their particular locations and temporalities in physical and virtual environments, and their absence — was just as significant as the substance of the message in the mobilisation of groups.

Other practices, such as group development and practice-evaluation, were identified as a compelling recommendation in the group development training course, and as lacking in their limited performances across the groups. The training course itself highlighted a limiting factor in promoting group development: the lack of accessible training available. There were opportunities for groups to integrate simple evaluative practices, particularly into their communications and events, which would help focus their limited resources, and mobilise the wider members' social networks and personal resources to greater effect.

The shared leadership underpinnings — of informal collaboration and networking — were also co-constitutive of the Borough Network. All groups engaged in formal networking at the borough level, with individual groups also active in networks of other scales. Understanding the spaces of engagement entered (at multiple jurisdictional scales) in order to draw in resources and increase capacity for developing the spaces of dependence (Cox 1998) brought clarity in how scale, flows, and resources coalesce in leadership practices. Each network offered different forms of support. Networks were both facilitators of social networks and consequences of them (Diani 1992). They offered support, a place to share expertise, to engage in commiseration and celebration and, importantly, to provide a space for the leadership to enact their activist habitus (Crossley 2002, Haluza-DeLay 2008). They were also crucial in helping to prevent burn-out. The Borough Network also operated with a core group, with the local groups acting in a similar way to the Transition model of independent projects networking together to achieve a similar goal, though at a differing scale.

The Transition model encouraged working with the local Council (Hopkins 2008b), as did literature on capacity in energy-related groups (Middlemiss and Parrish 2009). Formal collaborations were limited to the Energy group, due to the funding focus on carbon reduction and production, concomitant with the policy and discourse at that time. The collaborations provided resources, expertise, and a way of reaching multiple new publics, whilst requiring (and building) specific competences and capacities, and creating some unexpected pressures on resources. The longevity of the group and analysis period revealed their entrepreneurial spirit. They took advantage of the opportunities, and have subsequently found alternative funding models once the supportive policies were taken away, experimenting with projects and expanding them all the while. Whilst the other groups were not involved in funding programs or structured collaborations, they formed similar informal collaborations to maximise their resources, share ideas and reach the widest possible audiences. The entrepreneurial spirit was visible throughout the groups and networks, helping to cultivate innovations.

As a mobilisation, and part of the environmental movement, examining this form of leadership-as-practice contributes to social movement understandings of leadership. Recent work by Sutherland et al. (2014) also focuses on the social construction of leadership through an examination of the absence of leaders in anarchist organisations. Though the theoretical lens is different, they identify the practices used to prevent

leadership roles being seized. Their findings provide an interesting contrast to the more traditional understandings of charismatic leaders of larger political and cultural movements, highlighting structures and processes over personalities. This thesis provides another example, perhaps of a middle ground, where a calm collaborative leader is the supportive and supported caretaker (practitioner) of collaborative leadership practices, ensuring they endure alongside other longstanding members.

## **Understanding ingredients of grassroots mobilisation**

Together, the ingredients form a particular kind of sustainability: practice-changing, competence-building, convivial, and collaborative environmentalism. It works, mobilising those new to community-action, and beyond the groups to new publics and collaborations, through being action-oriented and inclusive. Individuals' levels of involvement and the kind of participation they were performing, were relatively understood by participants. This was associated with their capacity to commit, and their perceptions of what 'activism', environmentalism, and political action involves. Participants shared an understanding that they were co-performing practice change and community building. Those who identified themselves as activists enacted their more political activism through the support networks — inter-group, borough, national and international — which offered different forms of reciprocal support. These groups, therefore, represented a mobilisation, a part of the environmental movement, which inspired new mixed with old and drove committed participation at the grassroots community scale.

This thesis has endeavoured to explore the practices and characteristics of the groups, to establish the four ingredients of this form of mobilisation. I have observed various spatialities implicated in mobilisation practices. These include the dramaturgy of face-to-face encounters and the role of virtual spaces in developing group belonging. But also the sensorial and emotional effects of physical project spaces, their framing as being in and for the community. And finally, the particular distributions of narratives and the mobility of ideas and resources, as they journey through groups and networks, flowing through connections at multiple scales. Throughout, I encountered varying temporalities; longer-term and immediate motivations, biographical effects on involvement and journeys of participation, the rhythms of activities and



communications, and the longer-term changes in making the urban landscape more productive. Understanding this richness was enabled by the ethnographic approach and highlights the utility of the practice lens for understanding more complex practice-bundles and constellations of practices, which help explore complex forms of activity. This thesis responded to calls for exploring social practice and social movements together. I have demonstrated how a more recent practice approach can bring understanding to more recent forms of social movement mobilisation.

Social movement mobilisation can appear dramatic and reactive to political events. At the time of research design and fieldwork, via the media and communications efforts of the campaigns, we heard about the environmental movement's more reactive campaigns like Stop Climate Chaos, Camp for Climate Action, and Stop Heathrow. Through the practice lens, and by conducting the ethnography of neighbouring groups in a borough, I found grassroots sustainability group action to be different. It was a less visible undercurrent of continuous action, networked together across the borough, with individual participation journeys developing and connecting with each other over time, drawn together by shared concerns and building enduring interpersonal relationships within and beyond the groups.

This thesis, mirroring this kind of mobilisation, has become a long journey for me. Telling the story of the mobilisation of grassroots sustainability groups has been a pleasure, and both they and my connection to them have endured. I have a host of new questions and want to see how the projects and Haringey 40:20 have developed, whether the effects of the LCZ have endured, and to understand the effects of changing UK policy and funding sources. I would like to catch up with familiar faces and meet the newcomers, and listen to how stories of participation have developed or just begun. I am also looking forward to sharing some locally-grown herbal tea and homemade cake.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Information sheet and consent form

### Participant information sheet



#### **Study of the Grassroots Community-led Sustainability Initiatives in Haringey.**

I am both a local group member and a research student with the Geography Department at the Open University, studying for my PhD. This research will contribute to my thesis and any related publications and will be shared with the local groups. My research has been approved by the Ethics Committee (HREC) at the Open University. Below is some information on my project. If, after reading this sheet, you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

**What is the project?** The purpose of this research is to explore the recent growth of local grassroots community-led initiatives that are concerned with issues of sustainability and climate change in the local area. The thesis aims to contribute to the growing academic and policy debates about the transition to a low carbon society and to contribute to the success of local groups.

**What will I have to do?** I would like to talk to you about your motivations for joining in, how you came to be and continue to be involved and the day-to-day experiences of being a local group member. This will take different forms:

- I would like to chat to you informally whilst we do some of the groups day-to-day activities about what you are doing and why, the things you enjoy and any challenges you face.
- I would like to interview you about your participation, which I plan to audio/video record for later transcription and analysis.

As I am also member of the local groups, I will also be conducting participant observation during group activities.

**Do I have to take part?** Your participation in this research should be entirely voluntary; there is no obligation to take part and there is no payment.

**Will people know it is me?** I will be conducting my analysis and writing up of the thesis using an anonymised set of data.

**How will my data be used?** Your interview data (audio and transcript) will be held separately from any personal data following the Data Protection Act (1998). All your data will be held securely at the Open University and access limited to myself and my supervisors to ensure confidentiality.

**What if I change my mind?** You can withdraw consent at any time before and during the interview. You can also withdraw up to one month afterwards and all data referring to you will be destroyed. After this time, as I will be including anonymised findings in my ongoing research, analysis and thesis, it will not be possible to withdraw your contribution.

**How will I benefit?** While there will be no direct benefit, I am happy to provide you with a full transcript of our interview, and a copy of the resulting thesis and associated reports on request.

**How is the research funded?** My project is funded by the Geography Department at the Open University. If you would like to talk to someone else about this research please contact my supervisors Dr Clive Barnett (c.barnett@open.ac.uk) and Dr Petr Jehlicka (p.jehlicka@open.ac.uk) by email or phone (+44 (0)1908 654 456).

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you are happy to participate, please read and sign the consent form.

Yours, Anastasia Harrison

Department of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA Tel: +44 (0)7801969034, Email: a.harrison@open.ac.uk



## **Research Consent Form**

### **Study of the Grassroots Community-led Sustainability Initiatives in Haringey**

#### **Agreement to participate**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (please print name)  
agree to take part in this research project.

I have had the purposes of the research project explained to me.

I understand the research methods being used and how I will be participating in the research.

I have been informed that I may refuse to participate at any point before and during the interview by simply saying so and that I may withdraw my participation up to one month afterwards.

I have been assured that my confidentiality will be protected as specified in the information sheet.

I agree that the information that I provide can be used for educational or research purposes, including publication.

I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact Anastasia Harrison at Department of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, Tel: +44 (0)7801969034, Email: a.harrison@open.ac.uk

If I want to talk to someone else about this project, I can contact her supervisors Dr Clive Barnett (c.barnett@open.ac.uk) and Dr Petr Jehlicka (p.jehlicka@open.ac.uk) at Department of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, Tel: +44 (0)1908 654 456.

I assign the copyright for my contribution to the Open University Social Science Faculty for use in education, research and publication.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide your email address for communication about this project. A copy of this signed form will be emailed to you for your records

Email: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix 2: Borough Network members

Africa 2000	Haringey Solidarity Group
Afrikkare	Haringey Trades Union Council
Back To Earth Projects	Haringey Unison
Barnet Enfield & Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust	Hillfield Park Neighbourhood Watch
Bernie Grant Arts Centre (Tottenham)	iTech Training Centre
Bowes Park Community Association	Innovative Vision Organisation
Bruce Grove Residents Network,	Kaye's Friends
BTCV Haringey (conservation charity)	Languages Network Ltd
Bus Watch West Haringey	Lee Valley Bats
Climate Radio	Living Streets (Haringey)
Collage Arts	London Wildlife Trust (Haringey)
Crucial Steps	Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association
Fountain Area Residents Association	Muswell Hill Centre
Friends of Downhills Park	Muswell Hill Sustainability group
Friends of the Earth Muswell Hill	North London Local Exchange Trading System
Friends of the Earth Tottenham & Wood Green	ReStore Community Projects
Friends of Tottenham Marshes	St James's Church Legal Advice Centre
Gardens Residents Association	St. Martin of Porres RC Primary School
Groundwork (environmental regeneration charity)	Transition Crouch End
Haringey 40:20	Transition Finsbury Park
Haringey Allotments Forum	The Flame Tree
Haringey Association of Voluntary and Community Organisations	Tottenham Civic Society
Haringey Cycling Campaign	Tower Gardens Residents Group
Haringey Federation of Residents Associations	Tree Trust for Haringey
Haringey Freecycle	Urban Harvest
Haringey Friends of Parks Forum	Wards Corner Community Coalition
Haringey Green Party	Warner Estate Residents Association
Haringey Living Streets	West Green Residents Association
Haringey Mobility Forum	Wood Green Mennonite Church
Haringey Respect	
Haringey Shed (youth theatre group)	(Sustainable Haringey website 2010)

## Appendix 3: Fieldwork activity summary 2011-2012

Activities	Number	Description – location, attendees, aims
<b>Energy group</b>		
AGMs	2	Formal meeting, decision-making, voting for roles, in private homes
Socials	2	Christmas and summer social gatherings in private homes
Speaker events	6	Held in Methodist Church and British Legion
Draught Busting workshop	1	DIY workshop, 10 attendees in private home
Manning the stall - campaigning on the Broadway	1	Holding banners, encouraging petition signing
Manning the stall - celebrating the achievements of LCZ	1	LCZ project update and materials on stall at summer festival, with Green team
Low Carbon Communities Network conference	1	Large conference in Oxford, multiple UK local groups involved in energy
LCZ meeting with LSX	1	External support organisation for LCZ project, several London teams present
LCZ council meeting at Energy	2	Status meeting with Green team to discuss progress, at community centre, 8 present
LCZ focus groups	1	Aided Energy with LCZ project assessment and focus groups
LCZ status meeting at Energy	2	Internal status meetings on progress on LCZ
LCZ Door knocking day	1	I knocked on residents doors to drive sign-ups for LCZ installations
Communications collected	Ongoing	
Informal discussions	Ongoing	
<b>Transition group</b>		
Core group meeting	2	1 in local pub (10 attendees), 1 in private home (4 attendees)
Launch of Transition book	1	Transition event at local green project with Rob Hopkins speaking, 40 attendees
London Transition event	1	Regional Transition event, led by Rob Hopkins, approx. 80 attendees
Transition Training, and follow up meetings	2	Weekend training on group development, inclusion & diversity, with north London groups, 1 follow up dinner, 10 attendees

Transition Research Network	2	Transition-related research meetings Manchester, Plymouth (not strictly fieldwork but influential)
Transition conference	2	Two day annual international conference (Liverpool and London), approx.. 200 attendees
Communications collected	Ongoing	
Informal discussions	Ongoing	
<b>Urban Food group</b>		
Volunteer days	8	Regular volunteering day, approx.. 8-10 attendees
Training sessions	4	Attended the training program, approx.. 12 attendees
Communications collected	Ongoing	
Informal discussions	Ongoing	
<b>Nurture group</b>		
Volunteer days	8	Regular volunteering day - mix of gardening and cob building, approx.. 6-15 attendees
Community events	2	Community celebrations - seasonal. Approx. 15-20 attendees
Communications collected	Ongoing	
Informal discussions	Ongoing	
<b>Foraging group</b>		
Monthly events	7	Events outside and in community buildings, approx.. 15-20 attendees
Annual Celebration	2	Christmas party in private home, approx.. 20-25 attendees
Communications collected	Ongoing	
Informal discussions	Ongoing	
<b>Borough Network</b>		
Gatherings	3	Network gatherings in different community buildings, approx.. 25 attendees
Core group meeting	1	Small core group planning meeting
Communications collected	Ongoing	
Informal discussions	Ongoing	
<b>Haringey Council hosted events</b>		
Haringey 40:20 public meetings	1	Public launch meeting at local school
Haringey 40:20 internal status meeting	1	Internal meeting focused on progress of the carbon commission (with representatives from the Borough Network)
Communications collected	Ongoing	

Follow-up discussions		at LCZ stall, status meeting, over email
<b>Additional fieldtrips / activities</b>		
Tottenham	1	Field trip to small garden project within an estate
Hackney	1	Field trip to community garden which had moved into selling veg boxes
Green on the Screen film night	3	Attended by several local groups

### Recorded interviews

Name	Activity in groups	Date	Location
Helen	Borough Network, Energy, local growing	04/04/12	Home
Lucy	Energy, social enterprise, Nurture, Borough Network	08/02/12	Café
Paul	Energy, LCCN, Borough Network	03/04/12	Café
Chris	Energy, social enterprise, local residents association	06/04/12	Home
Susan	Energy, LCZ resident	11/04/12	Home
Charles	Energy, LCZ resident	11/04/12	Café
Linda	Energy	12/04/12	Home
Joseph	Energy, church energy project	30/04/12	Church
Steven	Energy, local friends of park group	01/05/12	Home
Louise	Energy, social enterprise, LCCN	12/06/12	Home
Debbie	Energy	12.07.12	Home
Laura	Energy, LCZ paid, social enterprise, extension projects	22.07.12	Café
Antonia	Energy, Nurture	16/01/12	Home
Karen	Borough Network, Energy, social enterprise	28/05/12	Home
Liz	Energy event speaker	17/04/12	Café
Nazia	Urban Food, Hackney growing project	21/04/12	Picnic on site
Wendy	Urban Food, Nurture, local Transition, local growing, Borough Network	22/05/12	Home
Tessa	Urban Food, Foraging	24/05/12	Picnic on site
Diane	Urban Food, Nurture	25/05/12	Picnic on site
Angela	Urban Food	26/05/12	Home
Natasha	Urban Food, Transition, Foraging	15/06/12	Picnic on site
Emma	Urban Food, Transition, Foraging	25/06/12	Picnic on site
Ben	Urban Food, Nurture, Transition ( local growing)	22/07/12	Picnic on site
Rose	Transition, Foraging	20/08/12	Home

### Non recorded meetings and lengthy discussions

Anonymised name	Activity in Groups	Location
Green Team	Collaborations with Energy and Borough Network	Offices
Ann	Borough Network, community resilience project	On field trip
Phil	Borough Network	At event
Dave	Foraging, Urban Food	At event
Amy	Foraging, Urban Food, Nurture, Borough Network	At event
Alex	Foraging, local gardening group	At event
Catherine	Transition training, Transition Network, Transition London	At training/events

# Appendix 4: Interview schedule

## Semi-structured interviews:

Intro to project, sign consent form

Warm up questions: where live, how long, links to the area, thoughts about the area, how long in the group

What brought you to environmentalism and/or group participation generally?

Discussion area 1:

- Tell me about your involvement with the group/project?
- How are you involved?
- How and why have you come to be involved with the group?
  - o Motivations (big issues, local/community concerns, solution/action)
  - o Trajectories (networks, work, place, people)
  - o Practices highlighted
- How do you identify with the group?
- What do you get from being involved personally?
- How has your involvement changed over time?
- Tell me about the role/impact that involvement has in your life?
  - o Relative importance, influence on others
  - o Influence on views/behaviours /practices
- Tell me about the group dynamics and relationships you have with the people and the project?
- Can you tell me about the things you enjoy, and the things you enjoy less?
- In terms of finding out about the group and keeping up to date with what's happening– can you tell me about what you've noticed/works/doesn't?

Discussion area 2: (Qs depend on level of involvement)

- Tell me about the group/project and how it works more generally?
- How would you describe its aims and activities?
  - o How it came, aims/ethos (met/not met), what does it actually do, future plans?
  - o Why is it important?
  - o Does it engage politically?
- How does the group vision meet your vision – any differences?
- How would you describe the benefits (negatives) it brings?
- Tell me about the people/stakeholders involved (and not involved)?
- Tell me about how the group works together? (management, culture, practices)
- Tell me about group members' involvement and how the group gets people involved?
- How has the group changed?
- Why do you think people stop coming? Or aren't interested?
- Tell me about some of the challenges and opportunities the group faces? Can it achieve its ambitions?
- Why do you think the group/project is in this space/place?

- Community (meaning) place/space characteristics, ingredients needed
- Could it work elsewhere?
- Describe any changes to the group over time? (people, funding, dynamics, projects)
- How does the group learn / respond to internal/external changes?
- Tell me about how it is linked to other projects/networks/council/etc?
  - Support?
  - Wider networks?

#### Discussion area 3: Other groups, views on groups generally

- Can you tell me about your participation in groups/projects/community/activism more generally
- Tell me about the groups you are involved with?
- How and why did you become involved in each?
- What do you get from each personally? How does it make you feel?
- How / are they linked?
- As a group member, how have you personally changed (in groups) over time?
- What are they trying to do? How do they differ?
- How have you been involved in groups/activism/environmental issues previously?

#### Role of groups versus other processes - politics

- Challenges and strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for local groups?
- How to engage the unengaged?
- Involved in / differences between local vs national/int'l campaigning (e.g. FoE), online (e.g. Avaaz) Green party
  - If don't engage, why not? Do they work?
- From a political perspective – what is the role of local groups?
- Where do responsibilities and actions lie with different stakeholders? (groups/national/international)
- Background biography (option not to answer if uncomfortable):
  - How do you think your background has/previous experience has influenced your own participation?
  - Upbringing/formative events, education (level/type), job/expertise, political leaning/views

Finally: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

#### Follow up whilst doing the group activity:

- Probe again into motivations and feelings about the group, practices etc (leading from first interview)
- Describe what you are doing and your time here – feelings/senses
- How would you describe this place/space?
- Talk about rituals of the group as they happen
- Talk about whether this is the usual experience, changes over time, new people coming/going and how that influences the group

# Appendix 5: Participant observation aide memoire

**Two sources provided useful reminders when conducting participant observation.**

## 1) ‘Six layers of description’

Crang and Cook (2007:51-52), in their guide to doing ethnographies, build on Cloke et al.’s (2004: 201–04) six layers of description, which moves through observation, participation and self-reflection. They provide the following examples of questions for researchers to use as a springboard for developing their own:

<p>(a) locating an ethnographic setting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– what country is it in?</li> <li>– is it in the north, south, east, west, centre or a combination?</li> <li>– is it a city, town, village or other setting?</li> <li>– where in that larger setting is it located?</li> <li>– what is the background and character of that setting?</li> <li>– how could you describe your setting’s location so readers can picture it?</li> </ul>
<p>(b) describing the physical space of that setting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– what size and shape did that setting have?</li> <li>– what were its main physical characteristics?</li> <li>– how would you describe them so that readers could picture them?</li> <li>– could you find or draw maps, do some sketching and/or take photographs?</li> <li>– (how) did this physical setting change?</li> </ul>
<p>(c) describing others’ interactions within that setting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– who were the people, and other ‘actors’, present in that setting that day?</li> <li>– what did you see them doing and hear them talking about?</li> <li>– how did they appear to be interacting with one another?</li> <li>– how could you describe this so readers can imagine being there?</li> </ul>
<p>(d) describing your participation in interactions in that setting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– where did you locate yourself in that setting that day?</li> <li>– who introduced you to whom and how did they describe what you were doing?</li> <li>– how did you see, hear and get involved with what was going on?</li> <li>– what did you learn from talking and doing things with the people there?</li> <li>– how did your participation change over time, and in other settings?</li> <li>– how could you describe this so readers can imagine being in your shoes?</li> </ul>
<p>(e) reflecting on the research process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– what were your first impressions and how have they changed?</li> <li>– what did you divulge to whom about your work and how did they react?</li> <li>– how did you think you were being placed by the people you worked with?</li> <li>– how did your research team (if you had one) work and fit in?</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– what effects did this seem to have on the way the research could be done?</li> <li>– how did your initial findings match your expectations?</li> <li>– what language problems did you have, and how did you deal with them?</li> <li>– what were the ‘surprises’, big or small, that needed further investigation?</li> <li>– did your powers of description, photography etc. capture enough?</li> <li>– (how) did the ways you did your research change people’s behaviour?</li> <li>– how was your research taking shape and what control did you have over this?</li> <li>– how did you change your questions, methods, etc. as a result of these questions?</li> <li>– how would you rewrite your methodology as if you had known this would happen?</li> </ul>
<p>(f) self-reflections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– how did various aspects of these research encounters make you feel?</li> <li>– how appropriately did you think you behaved in these encounters?</li> <li>– (how) did you (try to) please everyone, including your supervisors?</li> <li>– (how) did you (try to) do the right thing and get that research done?</li> <li>– (how) did people question your motives or behaviour in the field?</li> <li>– how did you respond to this and what effects did this seem to have?</li> <li>– how did you deal with your emotions in your fieldwork?</li> <li>– how did you have to manage your ‘self’ in the field, and how hard was this?</li> <li>– how and to whom did you let off steam, and how did they respond?</li> <li>– if you felt like giving up, what kept you going?</li> </ul>

## 2) ‘What to observe during participant observation’

Mack et al. (2011:20), in their field guide for data collectors, provide a list of six general categories that all researchers should consider during data collection. The list and details of what to observe and note are included below:

Category	Includes	Researchers should note
Appearance	Clothing, age, gender, physical appearance	Anything that might indicate membership in groups or in sub-populations of interest to the study, such as profession, social status, socioeconomic class, religion, or ethnicity
Verbal behavior and interactions	Who speaks to whom and for how long; who initiates interaction; languages or dialects spoken; tone of voice	Gender, age, ethnicity, and profession of speakers; dynamics of interaction

Physical behavior and gestures	What people do, who does what, who interacts with whom, who is not interacting	How people use their bodies and voices to communicate different emotions; what individual's behaviors indicate about their feelings toward one another, their social rank, or their profession
Personal space	How close people stand to one another	What individuals' preferences concerning personal space suggest about their relationships
Human traffic	People who enter, leave, and spend time at the observation site	Where people enter and exit; how long they stay; who they are (ethnicity, age, gender); whether they are alone or accompanied; number of people
People who stand out	Identification of people who receive a lot of attention from others	The characteristics of these individuals; what differentiates them from others; whether people consult them or they approach other people; whether they seem to be strangers or well known by others present